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SPECIAL ISSUE ON AFRICAN LITERATURE

GUEST EDITOR

Claire L. Dehon

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Abstract Most Algerian Francophone literature has been written since 1950, and thus the development of that literature has been intimately linked to the political events which forged the Algerian nation. Especially influential was the 1954-62 war of independence which for many years was a major contextual element in the literature. With the passage of time the Revolution has begun to be less and less cognitive in the lives and works of the young writers. For some Revolution lives on in the onerous evocations of horrors glimpsed; for others it is something relegated to history whereas for yet others it has become a political and social device.

The role the Revolution plays in a writer's creativity has tended to dichotomize the literature into a conservative branch of inward and backward looking patriotism and a radical branch of outward and forward looking experimentation. Both branches present equally fervent defenses of their loyalty to their country based on a variety of arguments, but the radical branch, regardless of its relative worth in terms of internal affairs, certainly is the branch which tends to transcend national idiom and to express itself in terms of wide spread and universal literary values (ES)

Sembène's Progeny A New Trend in the Senegalese Novel Albert Gérard and Jeannine Laurent	133
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Abstract The growth of the *Nouvelles Editions Africaines* in Senegal has proved favorable to the promotion of a national literature whose grass roots inspiration is in obvious reaction against the elitist proclivities of earlier writers trained in French universities. The younger novelists follow in the footsteps of Sembène Ousmane depicting actual living conditions among the under privileged and usually silent majority in present day Dakar. Recent examples are Aminata Sow Fall's *La Grève des battûs* (1979) Moussa Ly Sangaré's *Sourd muet je demande la parole* (1978) and Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (1979). Such works are designed for a local

readership, which is numerous enough because Senegal has the highest rate of literacy in French of all African countries. While the clinical realism of their narrative technique is similar to Sembène's in many respects, the characteristic feature of those writers is that they do not seem to have any political axe to grind: their detached lucidity and absence of bitterness makes their image of the African megalopolis all the more impressive and depressing (AG and JL)

Evembe's *Sur la terre en passant* and the Poetics of Shame

Richard Bjornson

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Abstract In *Sur la terre en passant* Evembe fashions a poetics of shame from the ordinary experiences of life in a large African city (Yaounde). He does it in such a way that the hallucinatory qualities and scabrous details of one individual's state of consciousness mirror the malaise which characterizes the larger social reality. The protagonist Iyoni (whose name means «shame» in the dialect of Evembe's native Kribi) experiences both misery and social respectability in an environment where traditional values have been lost, only to be replaced by artificial, dehumanizing hierarchies and an attitude of materialistic acquisitiveness. Despite the mysterious illness which is eroding his will to live, Iyoni always attempts to maintain a dignified pose, and he seeks to project his own poetic sensitivity and his morality of love and compassion onto the larger social fabric, but his physical body proves incapable of sustaining his ideals, and when he regards himself as a machine which ingests food and ejects clots of blood and excrement, he has begun to lose confidence in himself as a loving, feeling person capable of working toward a more noble social order. The resultant anxiety and shame permeate Evembe's novel, which has been undeservedly neglected due to its implicit antieestablishment critique of church, state, and the Negritude movement (RB)

Politics and the New African Novel: A Study of the Fiction of Francis Bebey

W. Curtis Schade

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Abstract From its inception African fiction has been strongly marked by political themes. In the late 1950's the virulent satire of Mongo Béti and Ferdinand Oyono stated the case against the denigration of African values inherent in all aspects of the colonial system. Their style and message subsequently gave way to novels focusing upon the drama of the transition of power at the moment of Independence. Whether optimistic or disillusioned, many of these novels featured real events and people, often thinly disguised, and sought to give an «inside» picture of that historical moment. Other tendencies developed in the late 60's, most notably a strongly autocritical, often radical, body of fiction represented by such writers as Ousmane Sembène and Alioum Fangouré, and the more distant, philosophical study of politics and society of writers like Ahmadou Kourouma. In all of these examples the contemporary political situation, whether viewed globally or as it affected the life of a simple man, was the primary moving force within the novel.

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By contrast this paper will concentrate upon the work of Francis Bebey exemplary of another current trend, fiction which while continuing to deal with political concerns does so in a different light creating different tones, using different techniques. In the three novels and one short story studied politics is subordinated to other concerns and is treated less reverently than heretofore. We see in the work of Bebey a re assessment of politics and its place in the life of contemporary (African) man (WCS)

Sembène Ousmane's *Xala* The Use of Film and Novel as Revolutionary Weapon

Kenneth Harrow

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Abstract Sembène Ousmane's *Xala* was written as a novel and made into a film in 1974. It is a biting attack upon the newly risen bourgeois class that has ascended to power and wealth in Senegal since independence. The ideological framework of *Xala* rests upon Marxist assumptions adapted to and modified by the circumstances in Africa. The distinctively Senegalese features which mark Sembène's portrayal include the Muslim and traditional religious beliefs which form the basis of the class oppression and the sexism depicted in *Xala*. They also supply the title to the work since *xala* means impotency in Wolof, and it is described with great humor by Sembène as the result of a marabout's curse. Sembène's treatment of the theme of class oppression focuses upon the great disparities that exist between the wealthy, elite classes and the impoverished masses especially the beggars and cripples who live on the streets of Dakar. By focusing upon the issue of acculturation in the film and by emphasizing the importance of imagery related to sight and the act of seeing, Sembène effectively overcomes the deficiencies of the novel in creating the film version of *Xala*. (KH)

Theme and Imagery in Tchicaya U Tam'si's *A Triche Coeur*

Emil A. Magel

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Abstract Partaking of the universal search for self knowledge, Gerald Felix Tchicaya U Tam'si's *A Triche Coeur* explores and evaluates the assumptions which shape his African identity. The thematic movement of the volume progresses from his initial state of naive ignorance of the realities of African history to a more mature awareness of it. Through images of uprooting and regeneration the poet discovers both the blood stained truth of European colonization of Africa and the traitorous collaboration of its renegades. Casting off the myths of the civilizing mission, the noble savage and the romantic posturings of the Negritude poets, U Tam'si releases himself from their psychological hold on him. Utilizing metaphors and similes which emphasize the discovery process, the poet generates a new vision of himself and urges other 'lost' Africans to follow his footsteps. (EAM)

Satire in African Letters 'Black Appraisals of White Ethnologists
in the Works of Ferdinand Oyono, Tchicaya U'Tam'si and Yambo
Quologuem

Ingeborg M. Kohn

213

Abstract Among the black African writers who have singled out whites for satirical treatment the novelists Ferdinand Oyono and Yambo Quologuem and the poet Tchicaya U Tam si have focused on a certain type of ethnologist the man who has come in the guise of explorer and scientist but whose prejudices ignorance greed presumptuousness and other negative characteristics are soon unmasked by his native hosts In their works we find portraits depicting the white ethnologist that are not only unanimous expressions of scorn and contempt but also examples of the skillful use of satire as a literary weapon (IMK)

Luandino Vieira's Short Fiction Decolonization in the Third
Register

Irwin Stern, Columbia University

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Abstract The central theme of Luandino Vieira's short fiction is the «anthropological» daily existence in the *musseques* slums which surround the city of Luanda The socio political question of the epoch—the liberation movements and the repression by the colonial rulers—do not escape the author's view Prior to the publication of Luandino's works, the language of Angolan fiction was indistinguishable from that of standard Portuguese fiction The relationship of Quimbundo the Bantu dialect of Luanda, and Portuguese is the key to the originality of Luandino's works This becomes quite evident in the collections *Velhas histórias* and *No antigamente na vida*

Language, register is Luandino's prime consideration The «establishment» figures of the stories speak in Portuguese, while the people of the *musseques* function in Quimbundo When the two social groups come into contact so do their languages The result is a third register of speech one which reflects the Portuguese Quimbundo heritage and results in a new literary language The basic contribution of Quimbundo is within the lexico semantic area In addition to a large number of Bantu words, new shades of meaning are given to common Portuguese terms through innovations in their traditional meaning and usage as well as through their recreation along African language principles Portuguese contributes its wealth of morphemes—principally suffixes—which enhance the Quimbundo vocabulary Syntax is similarly recreated

Although Luandino's short fiction has been called hermetic, it does present an epoch of Angolan society Its existence is an affirmation of national independence (IS)

Abstract In *Le regard du roi* Camara Laye attempted to assimilate into his own fictional world the structure, techniques and themes which he found in the works of Kafka. A close analysis of the novel reveals not only significant influence but direct imitation of Kafka. Although certain Kafkaesque techniques—for example, the limited perspective and the dispensation with time and space as measurable quantities—are often used effectively in the novel they lose much of their intricate complexity in a fictional world allowing, as Laye's does, for positive resolution. Such techniques become integral and meaningful elements only when Laye uses them within the context of his *négritude* theme. (PAD)

INTRODUCTION

FRANCOPHONE AND LUSOPHONE LITERATURES IN AFRICA

CLAIRE L. DEHON
Kansas State University

Westerners' interest in African literatures in European languages has in the past depended more on their political and social convictions than on their true admiration for African belles-lettres. As a consequence, this interest subsided greatly when most African nations became independent and when colonialism was officially abandoned. Yet each year African authors continue to publish books written in European languages. Since many of these works are printed and distributed solely in Africa, reviews of them rarely appear in Western journals. This special situation makes it difficult for the curious reader or the researcher to gather primary material and to keep abreast of the latest trends. In an effort to promote these literatures and at the same time to contribute to their study, the editorial board of *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* has devoted this issue to francophone and lusophone literatures—while anglophone literature also deserves more scholarly attention, it is not included within this journal's purview.

Of these two literatures, francophone literature is the richest and the most well known. Based on the history and cultures of the countries from which it originated, French African literature is divided into two groups: the Maghreb in North Africa and black African in West and Central Africa. The older of the two, Maghreb literature started during the twenties with authors such as Caïd Ben Cherif and Abdelkader Hady-Hamou. A little later, black African writers René Maran and Ousmane Socé also initiated a new

literature Despite their obvious racial, historical, cultural, and religious differences, the two branches of African literature in French followed parallel evolutions

Initially African authors had to appreciate the possibilities of the French language and to explore how European literary genres and styles could fit their special needs Imitation of European models thus characterized this first phase Subsequently, after a pause during the Second World War, the literatures began to develop more fully Anti-colonialism, their first cause and inspiration, seemed at the time to be their only reason for existence Influenced by the style as well as the ideas of writers such as Zola and Sartre, African authors attacked the French colonial administration This *littérature engagée* revealed to European public how colonialism had in fact limited freedom and promoted social inequities while pretending to bring civilization to the «dark continent » It exposed the racism of the white people and also dealt with the problems, acculturation and uprooting for example, that confronted those natives who wanted a new way of life Experiencing these difficulties themselves, some authors attempted to find by contrast a new pride in their past (the *négritude* movement of Senghor and Césaire), whereas still others preferred to destroy old tradition altogether When independence came to the various colonies, however, intellectuals realized that they could not return to former times, nor could they eliminate all traces of colonialism Hence, writers resolutely confronted their times Abandoning the theme of white imperialism and political struggle, they became interested in other aspects of life as well Everyday situations provided a fecund source of subjects and themes, while traditional literature and the emerging middle class inspired new characters In their treatment of problems such as polygamy, dowry-based marriages, tribal and religious animosities, difficulties of the educated in finding an appropriate job, and the corruption and tyranny of some governments, writers created works relevant to the literate African No longer concerned with pleasing or engaging a white audience, they adapted the French language to their own artistic needs, and while one can not yet speak of an African French, their works are, despite their European genres and language, truly African in form and content

Whereas francophone literature has evolved from an artistic endeavour aimed at the educated few to a popular literature intended to appeal to the largest possible public, lusophone literature ap-

pears, at least for the moment, mired in ideology—the promotion of class struggle and the demand for freedom for every one (e.g. Castro Soromenho)—Political events, the brand of colonialism imposed by the Portuguese, and censorship (Agostinho Neto for example was jailed several times for his controversial publications) have contributed to the general neglect that this body of literature has suffered. Difficulties in obtaining material and scarcity of information force the critic to assess this literature with some prudence. Yet, it does appear to share some characteristics with francophone books. Like their French counterparts, these writers have sought inspiration in ancestral literature such as proverbs and songs. While imitating traditional types of characters and modes of narrative, they too adapt the European language to their needs with the same lack of respect that some francophone writers have at times shown for the French Academy (e.g. Francisco-José Terreiro).

Evidently it will take some time before the Western reader can fully appreciate what has been done in Portuguese in the meantime this issue of *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* attempts to give to non specialists a kind of *état present* of the critical methods used in the study of African literatures, and it seeks also to provide specialists with information on a number of subjects. The variety of approaches and of subjects represented in this special issue underscores the richness of the African literatures in European languages and the wealth of criticism and discussion that they have generated.

The first two articles of this issue employ a historical and descriptive method, whereas the others are organized around a central theme. The first one, by Eric Sellin, «Literary Aftershocks of the Revolution. Recent Development in Algerian Literature,» serves a dual purpose. On one hand, it describes how the Algerian novel has evolved, on the other it gives a survey of the most recent publications. It is followed by Albert Gérard and Jeannine Laurent's «Sembène's Progeny. A New Trend in Senegalese Novel,» an article that also sheds light on the latest generation, but in black Africa. The juxtaposition of these articles will help the reader to discern the differences and similarities between the two branches of francophone literature. Richard Bjornson's study, «Evebe's *Sur la terre en passant* and the Poetic of Shame,» Curtis Schade's «Politics and the New African Novel. A Study of Francis Bebey,» and Kenneth Harrow's «Sembene's *Xala*. The Use of Film

and Novel as Revolutionary Weapon» reveal the different ways in which some African authors have disguised their political and social thoughts in order to avoid possible censorship or persecution, but most of all in order to create what they conceive of as genuine work of art. Expressing their discontent with African society and encouraging a new revolution aimed no longer at colonialism but at the evil which exists in every man, they demonstrate that engagement does not preclude devotion to art. Emil Magel's article, «Theme and Imagery in Tchicaya U Tam'si *A Triche Coeur*,» shows how a poet, anxious to appeal not only to his countrymen but also to a much larger public, has elegantly interwoven his social concerns with universal themes. Next, Ingeborg M. Kohn's «Satire in Francophone African Literature: Black Appraisal of White Ethnologists» elaborates on an essential aspect of African literatures: humor, the best weapon against man's sad destiny. Finally, the two concluding articles examine processes by which African artists have imitated European art forms. «Luandino Vieira's Short Fiction: Decolonization in the Third Register,» by Irwin Stern, explains some of the techniques used in appropriating Portuguese. «Kafka's Influence on Camara Laye *Le Regard du roi*,» by Patricia A. Deduck, describes what a specific author has found of interest in a particular European novel and how he has integrated his borrowings into his own writings.

As these articles demonstrate, African authors have borrowed eclectically, and their styles vary according to their personalities and their origins (Algeria, Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Guinea, Mali, and Senegal). Spanning the years 1954 to 1979, the works discussed here moreover reveal the emergence of certain patterns. The geographical and temporal distances covered in this issue therefore assure the reader that, while it is impossible to do justice to every deserving work or author, efforts have been made to present a general view and to reveal particular as well as representative qualities of the literatures concerned.

LITERARY AFTERSHOCKS OF THE REVOLUTION. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ALGERIAN LITERATURE

Eric Sellin
Temple University

Revolution is not simply a limited period of armed struggle, the armed struggle—if victorious—rather constituting the middle section in the three-part spectrum of Revolution. The three periods are 1) the build-up or preparation, 2) the visible and most traumatic period of overt violence, and 3) the post-war period of stabilization and implementation of the new. Each period has its difficulties and in the case under discussion each period emitted impulses which may be traced into the new Algerian literature.

Revolution, taken in the broadest sense, is the verso of colonization. By this, I mean that the origins of decolonization—the first thrust of the first stage of Revolution—are inherent in colonization itself. Studies of the psychology of colonization and the colonized man have been made by Albert Memmi, O. Mannoni, and Frantz Fanon, and the French-language literature of Algeria has provided a worthy corpus of material for penetrating psycho-sociological analyses by Jean Déjeux, Isaac Yetiv, Bernard Aresu, Charles Bonn and others, not to mention the psycho-novels of Nabile Farès, Rachid Boudjedra, and Mohammed Dib.

The scope of this essay is limited to the more recent manifestations of revolutionary literature vis-à-vis the older ones in the Algerian literature written in French, a literature now barely half a century old. I should like, however, to review briefly the global trends of this literature against the backdrop of political events.

Between 1920 and 1950, nationalistic political clubs began to emerge and there were several heralds of the future literary blossoming, such as Jean Amrouche. Furthermore, World War II and the fall of France caused major cracks to appear in the founda-

tion of the colonial edifice May 8, 1945, was a most significant date in this period On that day, demonstrations in Guelma and Sétif turned into massacres when the French army intervened

1950 saw the publication of Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*, the first work in what we can now perceive as a new era, but 1952 is generally taken as the starting date of the new, enriched period of Algerian Francophone literature because first novels by two major writers appeared in that year *La Grande Maison* by Mohammed Dib and *La Colline oubliée* by Mouloud Mammeri Critics were later to dub these writers and several others «the generation of '52» These writers were also sometimes referred to as the «generation of '54» in recognition of the beginning of the armed phase of the war of independence against the French on November 1, 1954 The major literary event during the war years was the publication, in 1956, of Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*, considered by many to be the «great Algerian novel»

In 1962, the Evian negotiations led to a cease-fire in March and independence in July There followed several months of infighting from which Ben Bella emerged as the leader, with, to be sure, the indulgence of army strongman Colonel Houari Boumediène In 1965, Boumediène deposed Ben Bella and ruled Algeria with a firm hand until his untimely death in 1978 His successor, Chadli Benjedid, has been attempting to consolidate Algeria's strengths while exploring the relative benefits of greater internal and external *détente*

During the postwar puritan years of Boumediène's leadership, several literary events occurred which are pertinent to this study In 1968, we find the first signs of dissent among the younger writers (Youcef Sebti, Rachid Bey, etc) who published a mimeographed manifesto entitled *Mutilation* Rachid Boudjedra's controversial novel, *La Répudiation*, appeared in 1969 During the same year, Jean Sénac, a poet and mentor of young poets who was murdered under obscure circumstances in 1973, presented a lecture and recital of work by Sebti, Bey, and other young rebels 1969 also saw the launching of *Promesses*, the literary organ of the Algerian Ministry of Culture

The modern literary period from the publication of Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* in 1950 to the present day may, with what little hindsight we can achieve, be divided into two periods 1950 to 1968 and 1968 to today Before 1968, there are the generation-of-'52 authors (Feraoun, Dib, Mammeri, Yacine, etc), and after the

literary revolt of 1968-69, no doubt inspired in part by the Parisian phenomenon of May, 1968, there is a split between counter-culture and establishment

The counter-culture consists of 1) the new voices of Boudjedra, Farès, the *Mutilation* poets and others and 2) old voices making new sounds, notably those of Dib and Mammeri. The establishment is made up of sundry writers—amateur and professional—who publish in the official and quasi-official outlets such as *Promesses*, *El Moudjahid*, and *Algerie-Actualité*

The violent stage of the Revolution (1954-62) remains a factor in today's literature in various ways or under various guises

We have direct reminiscences—real or fictionalized. These have become a stock item in *Promesses* and are often ineptly phrased or resemble the «true tales» one encounters in magazines like *Saga* (such as a merchant seaman's recollections of the «Bloody Run to Murmansk»). Some writers, like Noureddine Aba, in his recent poem *Gazelle apres minuit* (1979), continue to live and write as though haunted by the Revolution, as though it had happened yesterday

You understand nothing but his certainty
 () That it is enough for you to dare()
 In order that one day, one shout, at dawn
 Tear apart in a single act 130 years of slavery!
 In the forefront of that first November morning
 A red torch burns, its mane tossed on the wind¹

It is apparent, however, that the Revolution is rapidly becoming legend and—for the very young—ancient history. Even a novel like Mammeri's *L'Opium et le bâton* (1965), which divides its attention between the war effort and the boudoir, has been «expurgated» in the movie version, suffering a kind of cultural laundering so that it became what Mammeri labeled a «western» with little resemblance to his original text

On a more serious literary level, episodes of the Revolution

crop up in the novels written during and after the war. A haunting nightmare recurs in Nabile Farès's first novel, *Yahia, pas de chance* (1970), published when Farès was twenty-nine. Farès reveals (I hesitate to use the word «tells») in an impressionistic, oneiric prose the brutal assassination of two men by Yahia's Uncle Saddek and a taxi driver. The young Yahia, who is an innocent and totally unprepared witness to this ghastly event, is deeply affected by the murder although Farès prepares for the event with a harsh prose riddled with explosive and sacrificial words like «explosion,» «burst,» «drown,» and «sheepskin»

Uncle Saddek offers him a cigarette and a light and passes his pack around to the driver and the two merchants from Algiers. Five tobacco-scented stars illumine the metal and the sheepskin seat cushions inside the taxi. The child closes his eyes against the smoke. He is in a daze from the mad rush of the train, his gaze skimming along the jagged ridge of the mountains, the afternoon, the explosion of the sun in the love between Twilight and Earth, the furrows of the sky in the plow of Shade and Heat which drown and come alive again like furious grass and sketch the bright colors of life. *the close of day resembles a Bearskin and its claw holds the whole moon in the night*. In the courtyard of the garage, the rustle of cicadas and the sea-green voice of the toads perched in the throats of the two cowards evoke in Yahia an acrid odor of figs. Sacrifice! Sacrifice! A sharp *doum-doum* like the steel daggers of the Tuaregs flashes from the burnous. The driver of the taxi takes part in the throat-slashing, his hand red with teeth marks. Yahia vomits bile against the rear window of the Renault (). Two men are in their death throes, their throats boiling up, fear everywhere. Uncle Saddek leads Yahia into the street. The song from a mosque crackles the village. Life is on the other side of an endless bloodbath. Two hours later a bomb bursts inside the walls of the courthouse.²

There follow the inevitable reprisals for this bombing, and more people die. Yahia continues to have seizures and vomiting fits for several days and the themes of this assassination, of the death of the freedom-fighter Ali-Saïd who had joined the maquis in the Kabyle mountains and of the kidnapping of a relative recur throughout the book.

Farès's generation, which grew up in the midst of the war, simply could not fail to be traumatized—much as psychologists say the children of Northern Ireland are today being psychologically sacrificed. It is difficult to tell to what degree the demented narrations of Boudjedra's protagonists in *La Répudiation* (1969) and *L'Insolation* (1972), not to mention the bewildered Algerian émigré in *Topographie idéale pour une agression caractérisée* (1975), the functionary in *L'Escargot entêté* (1977), and the semi-nameless people of *Les 1001 Années de la nostalgie* (1979), are the result of a willed participation in a trend somewhat in vogue in Europe or the spontaneous expression of a psyche derailed by the trauma of violence. Suffice it to say that virtually no Algerian family—not to mention French families—was spared some death, torture or insanity during the war experience. The best-known examples—though the first is from the preparatory stage of the Revolution—are the insanity of Kateb Yacine's mother after Kateb's arrest and feared loss during the May 8, 1945, riot in Sétif and the assassination of Mouloud Feraoun by a Secret Army Organization (OAS) terrorist squad on March 15, 1962.

In Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film «The Battle of Algiers»—based on a critical 1957 episode of the hostilities—Larbi Ben M'hidi tells Ali la Pointe that the most difficult stage of the Revolution will occur after the war has been won. Ben M'hidi's solemn words uttered in a moment of respite from hiding when the two men are taking some fresh air on a rooftop in the Casbah are most to the point. If it is easy to be zealous in war, says Ben M'hidi, it is perhaps easier to be complacent in peace. There is inherent in wars of decolonization the perennial danger that a new bureaucracy and a new bourgeoisie will take over, adopting the ways of the previous colonial regime or else substituting for it an inappropriate mold, as Ben Bella did in Algeria. There is also the danger that the goals of the Revolution will give way to self-interest, a pitfall awaiting any regime in any governmental system.

In 1969, in Algiers, I asked the Angolan poet Mario de Andrade how long it would take Angola to achieve independence. After some comments on how American-made arms destined for

NATO use were being illegally funneled to Portugal's troops in Angola and significantly prolonging the fight, Andrade concluded that the real struggle would begin after the Portuguese left and various Angolan factions poised on the border or fighting within would turn against one another in a struggle to see whose ideology would prevail. His prediction came true. Similarly, the temporary alliances of the wartime FLN faltered after the Algerian liberation, and gave way to an internal power struggle in the fall of 1962. After Ben Bella took power, he had to work hard to maintain it against opposition to his disastrous economic policy based on an ill-considered compromise between state- and worker-run enterprises and an emphasis on agricultural development in the fertile crescent. In 1965, Boumediène deposed Ben Bella and launched a new period of programs aimed at developing industry and exploiting natural resources. A new generation of technocrats emerged, and if the «responsables» who ran the country under Ben Bella moved, despite their public postures, away from the illiterate peasants and mountain folk who had fought, died, and ultimately prevailed in the shooting war—while some more educated Algerians sat out the war abroad—the technocrats under Boumediène forgot, to some people's thinking, those martyrs and the land they represent and have actually embraced the very essence of the enemy so recently expelled. This phenomenon has been obliquely condemned by Mouloud Mammeri in his essay «La Mort absurde des Aztèques».

Henceforth any distinction which we erase—by whatever means—is an absolute crime: nothing will ever replace it, and its death increases the risk of death for others. () For it is apparent that as the years pass, more and more vast portions of humanity will scamper onto the royal road to Western technical, materialistic, efficient, programmed civilization. And in that they are probably being led astray, for we are becoming more and more aware of the wants, frustrations, and servitudes of a culture which until recently knew only prestige. () Those Third-World men who reject the values of the West, in behalf of an often mythic and sometimes fabricated authenticity, are actually more enslaved by those values than anyone else, for they are subject to the limitations accompanying those values without possessing the means of controlling them. 3

We are dealing, then, with a confrontation between the puritans preaching the old precolonial values—such as the religious elders, or *Ulema*, and the unassimilated Berbers—and the puritans of the new technocratic regime. He who would be a writer must adopt one of these views, or describe them coolly from above, or possibly hide from both of them as the protagonist Rachid does in Boudjedra's *La Répudiation*.

Several authors have written of this neo-colonial struggle in which the adversaries are no longer the autochthonous elements against the colonial «Autre,» or Other, from abroad, but rather two forces within Algerian society.

Charles Bonn, in his interesting study entitled *La Littérature algérienne de langue française et ses lectures* ingeniously links the two opposing forces or attitudes to a deep-seated and longstanding animosity (and I mean the words «Anima» and «Animus» to be interpreted as polarization or opposition) between the closed space and the open space, between the City and the Land, and Bonn would make of the Revolution not only a political and economic struggle, but also a paroxysmic bridging of the two poles, much as he discerns symbols of linkage in such concrete things as trees.

Early books, like Dib's *La Grande Maison* and Mammeri's *La Colline oubliée*, tended to be either urban or rural. Since 1968, the serious writers seem to be encompassing both, addressing themselves more squarely to the challenge of the choice between tradition and technocracy. Even if it is sometimes difficult to tell which side the author criticizes—and some prefer to be cautious—the dilemma itself is central.

Boudjedra's dithyrambic novels castigate both sides: tradition and the technocratic bourgeoisie. His tales are not so much parables as visceral explosions, personal vituperations, diatribes apparently born of his private frustrations. Although three novels (*Topographie idéale pour une agression caractérisée*, *L'Escargot entêté*, and *Les 1001 Années de la nostalgie*) are, to some extent allegorical, Boudjedra's masterpiece *La Répudiation* and his second novel *L'Insolation* only become parables to the degree that we, the readers and critics, would impose that label upon them.

Perhaps more probing are the recent novels of Mohammed Dib: *Dieu en Barbarie* and *Le Maître de chasse*, the latter rivaling Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* for the laurels won as the greatest novel by an Algerian. *Dieu en Barbarie* and *Le Maître de chasse* sum up the various tensions in post-1968 Algeria much as Dib's earlier trilogy

(*La Grande Maison, L'Incendie, Le Métier à tisser*) recorded the tremors of the pre-Revolution awakening

The main characters of this second and as yet unfinished trilogy, first introduced in *Dieu en Barbarie* (1970), are Dr Berchig, comfortably straddling the old and the new, Jean-Marie Aymard, a French *coopérant*, Kamal Waéd, the caricature of a technocrat of the new administration, and Hakim Madjar, a spiritual drifter. In *Le Maître de chasse* (1973), Dib isolates two principal characters in a spiritual and ideological clash. Hakim Madjar, who grows into a mystical symbol of the forces of nature and the infinite, and Kamal Waéd, the technocrat. They clash over a potential water supply in an arid part of the country. Hakim claims he can find water there by divining methods, but Waéd will not permit him to attempt the search since it has been scientifically demonstrated that there can be no water in the area. Hakim goes to the area without permission and the army goes to arrest him. There is a confrontation and Hakim is killed in an absurd misunderstanding reminiscent of the Kent State incident in 1970. When the authorities try to recover the body, they find that Hakim has been secretly buried in an unmarked grave by the local peasants. He thus becomes a martyr, a source of strength in the land from which the peasants may in turn derive the strength with which to resist technocracy's narrow viewpoint. This parable not only reminds us of Mammour's fears of ethnocide but also is similar to the burial of Ali-Saïd in Farès's *Yahia, pas de chance*. There is much prevarication as to where Ali-Saïd has been buried or if he has actually been buried at all. Nobody has seen him buried and his spirit seems to hover in the air like a haunting and hazy unknown song akin to that sung by Tante Aloula by the tomb. Note that we have, here, a parable not unlike the corporeal disappearance from the sepulcher in the Christian resurrection. As Farès writes

Si Saddek had requested that the body be placed in the garden, on the olive-wood table, after which everyone had left Si Saddek's house and had returned home. Si Mokhtar had come back three days later and it was he who had carried away Ali-Saïd's body, concealed under a large burnous, and brought it here to the cemetery. It was only later, after Si Mokhtar had left, that the people of the village could go up there. The tomb was already closed and cemented shut (p 142)

Since 1968, there have really been, as we have mentioned, two Algerian literatures, one which has evolved freely of itself even as it has kept pace with international literary developments and another which has consistently paid lip service to the cultural prescriptions of the so-called «ongoing Revolution» This second literature is what Charles Bonn terms «Social Discourse»

there are, in fact, two Algerian «literatures» of French expression The novels by Boudjedra, Boumahdi, Bourboune, Dib () are published in France and more or less banished, if not actually forbidden, in their authors' country This literature of rupture and Differentiation «lives within a scar,» says Mourad Bourboune in *Le Muezzin* (1968) It strives desperately to rejoin the humiliated mother, but it is excluded from the maternal land The Social Discourse does not allow that which, in this manner, calls it into question, down to its most secret, most painful roots

But there is a literature of Social Discourse () On the one hand, the Social Discourse provokes and produces generally mediocre texts On the other hand, it attempts to appropriate to its own ends a more brilliant literature, often produced outside the Social Discourse or simply before it came into being

The serious writers in Algeria are often faced with the dilemma of having to choose between compromise and neglect, or even exile In a way, they are forced to make a political act out of their simple desire for literary independence

The implications of decolonization are many and continue to be a source of inspiration—overt or subconscious—in the post-1968 writings The self-hatred which is a natural by-product of colonization and the so-called «civilizing mission» has been thoroughly analyzed by Fanon, Memmi, and Mannoni and it constitutes the central theme of Mouloud Mammeri's play, *Le Banquet* (1973), about the humiliation of Montezuma and the Aztecs That his play is intended as a modern parable or lesson is obvious from anachronistic references to Nazism, brain-washing, the «mission civilisatrice,» and passages like the following dialogue with its ap-

parent references to surrealism (notably Breton's psychic automatism, words which make love, and Nadja) and to structuralism (what I take to be an oblique reference to Michel Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses*)

THE IDEOLOGIST

Today the most inconsequential pedant fresh out of school forces words to couple in unnatural ways And the words, all connections broken, without make-up or clothing, like whores on market day, run about as though crazed, unpredictable, and ineffectual

AXAYOTL

When the hard chain of logic no longer holds them together and when they come out of the mouth by the capricious grace of a woman-inspiration or an infantile automatism, the released words swarm like microbes and, like microbes, they undermine the firmest tissue

THE IDEOLOGIST

When from the hook of words there is no longer suspended the sure thread of their association with things, the same vertigo ends up sucking both things and words into the abyss

There is, in addition, a key passage in which Montezuma and the Aztecs are made to repeat humiliating remarks, acknowledging themselves to be abject and dirty This is a variation on the theme of self-hatred inherent in colonialism and the psychology of the colonized person

The need to return to one's roots and thus negate the «altérité,» or otherness, of the colonial experience is inextricably woven into the very fabric of the life and literature of Algeria The conquest of the Other, which has assumed such perverse forms in literature as the need for domination of European women (French

wives and mistresses abound in the novels of Feraoun, Dib, Mammeri, Boudjedra, Haddad, Farès, and others) before culminating in the armed liberation, led naturally to self-analysis. The quest for one's true identity, one's real roots, has opened rifts, some new, some old.

As one seeks to put down roots, one must, indeed, ask what sort of roots are appropriate. Should the roots be the short taproots of the new national identity, disregarding all that preceded the Revolution? Such would appear to be the rationale behind the Social Discourse. As I have already mentioned, this has produced a curious literature of formula and repetition (albeit without the grace of traditional arabesque) which only a few spokesmen have dared criticize. The officially approved attitude is clearly expressed in a passage from a newspaper article by Salah Fellah:

Among the many resolutions, that of the men of letters, the writers, and the poets, is of particular interest to us: it calls for freedom of expression.

In a revolutionary country like ours, such demands are surprising and disconcerting, even scandalous, to the most casual observer.

As for those who remain silent out of sterility, who rebel through alienation or opportunism, who repudiate through despair, who shout exaggeratedly through mimicry, who demand freedom of expression through deviation, well, their withdrawal from the scene will scarcely hinder the ineluctable stride of the Algerian toward his fulfillment nor the inexorable course of history.⁶

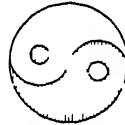
Mostefa Lacheraf challenged this very attitude in a statement sent to the colloquium on Maghreb literature held at Hammamet, Tunisia, in December, 1968:

Now, the exploitation of this vein, well after the end of the war of independence, perpetuates an anachronistic nationalism and turns people away from the new realities and from the struggle necessary if we are to transform society on a sound basis, free of inhibiting myths and epic chants of minimal potential. The pseudo-patriotic exploitation of this vein constitutes a deliberate or near-deliberate diversion of the intellectuals and the workers by the new merchant and ex-

plotive bourgeoisie towards an inoperative self-gratification, towards a fervent cult of the recent past in which this bourgeoisie, still latent until a very short while ago, took no part and which they now would have the masses cling to like opium '

The group of young poets surrounding Jean Sénac patently rejected the official line and opted for a totally free, even shocking expression. The poetic analogue of Boudjedra's *La Répudiation* is the poetry of Youcef Sebti, Rachid Bey, Djamal Imazitan, Boualem Abdoun, and one or two other poets launched by Sénac '.

Powerful, indeed, are the two poems by Sebti which form an incandescent diptych «La Soleil» and «Le Lune,» in which the reversed gender of these words acts much as the kernel of the opposite element in the center of each half of the yin-yang symbol of Tao



And beautiful and compelling, indeed, are several of the poems by Rachid Bey. Typical in its blend of searing images and lyrical cadences is Bey's «Destin» which contains one of the most haunting images in the anthology

et j'ai vu des VIVANTS
mourir le long du verbe AIMER
Ce soir-là la vie avait une saison de plus

(and I saw the LIVING
die along the verb TO LOVE
That evening life possessed an extra season)'

However, is there not, as well, another identity to be sought? Are there not deeper roots to be planted, in a return to the primal sources and to the earth, the arid eternity of the age-old *hauts-plateaux* where Dîb's mystic, Hakîm Mađjar, lies buried somewhere? This return—from the enclosure of city room or prison cell to enclosure of the maternal earth (womb, grave, or Mother Ogress of animistic lore)—is much more far-reaching than the one limited to Third-World rhetoric. There is, in this instance, a

rift some might not have foreseen. About half of the recognized Algerian writers using French are Kabyles. Now, the breaking asunder of the matrix of the French colonial collectivity and the seeking out of new and fresh self-definitions had the effect of widening the old schism between the Berber and the Arab-Muslim factions. This has been a significant literary aftershock of the Revolution and concomitant decolonization.

Nabile Farès recorded immediate traumatic material in *Yahia, pas de chance* with the recollection of the assassination of the two men in the taxi, but he has also reflected on the question of cultural roots and has suggested that decolonization has only been partially achieved. The Arab-Muslim colonial wave which preceded the French one has not been neutralized as had the Punic, Roman and Turkish ones before it, and the French one in the recent instance. With petulant pride, Farès writes, in *Un Passager de l'occident* (1971)

After the French decolonization of Algeria, there will be the Islamic decolonization of Algeria. For regardless of what our Mohammedan brothers would think and try to make us think, the Islamization of Algeria is not a divine phenomenon, but, as in the case of any phenomenon, historical.¹⁰

Farès takes up this theme once again in *Le Champ des oliviers* (1972)

Algeria is looking for men and women who will acknowledge her to have emerged *sui generis* and not from some Islamic Arab country. Algeria is made in such a way that she has not received full satisfaction from those who claim to be her current masters.¹¹

And he is scathingly sarcastic when he speaks directly of the Berber's fate in the new era

Today there are no more kingdoms and every Berber tries to look out for himself as best he can since he has been too severely stricken collectively ever to become that which he has never been: a single people. Either he opens a café. Or he lets himself be Arabized. (p. 213)

A by-product of the return to one's sources, precipitated by the Revolution which had removed the false identity and/or self-hatred prevalent under the colonial regime, was a renewed interest in accounts of daily traditional life. What may have once seemed exotic and for exportation was perhaps now perceived as a matter of ethnic survival. Two very moving accounts—moving for their candor and their admirable attention to detail—document a «self» relatively unaffected by the «Other».

Ali Boumahdi's *Le Village des Asphodeles* (1970) is billed as a novel, but it is more plainly an autobiographical account of growing up in a small city on the threshold of the Sahara, Berrouaghia. The other book is a delightful account, *Histoire de ma vie* (1968), in which Fadhma Aït Mansour Amrouche, the mother of Jean Amrouche and Marguerite Taos-Amrouche, tells her life story. These works also serve as a kind of link with the «ethnographic» novels of the 1950's such as Feraoun's novel *Le Fils du pauvre*, and Dib's novels on growing up in Tlemcen and Bni Boublen.

The flat, self-effacing style of the books by Boumahdi and Fadhma Aït Mansour Amrouche highlights by contrast a major characteristic of the majority of the more recent novels. The first stage of colonial autochthonous creative writing tends to be ethnographic. The principal purpose of these novels seems to be to depict ordinary indigenous life for readers in the colonial metropole (this was true of the literature south of the Sahara, as well, witness Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*). The novels by Feraoun, Dib, Malek Ouary, Mammeri, and others which were published between 1950 and 1956 fall into this category. Liberation is implicit in a departure from this ethnographic phase of writing. In most works published since Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* appeared in 1956, the emphasis has progressively shifted from content to form, especially since 1968.

Kateb Yacine remained a unique and brilliant beacon for almost a decade after the publication of *Nedjma*, but the works of several new writers have now established a trend. It is difficult to determine to what degree a violent and explosive style is a spontaneous symptom of decolonization and the Revolution or to what

degree it might rather be a learned technique. No doubt there is a mixture of motives and influences.

In any event, the recent works of Boudjedra, Farès, Sebti, Bey, and Moroccans Mohammed Khair-Eddine and Abdelkébir Khatibi are characterized by 1) a disregard for the well-made text, 2) authorial intervention and a self-conscious awareness of one's role as creator of the surface words in question, and 3) a stammering, confessional tone.

The piling up of words in the novels of Boudjedra and Khair-Eddine seems to be the result of near-automatic writing, but there are some indications that Farès's later highly-contorted prose is less than spontaneous. There are repeated references to the narrator/author's private struggle with his text. There are such highly-contrived devices as the multiple progression from page to page in *Le Champ des oliviers* where one can read, say, from page 178 on to page 179 or jump without syntactical difficulty straight from page 178 to page 181.

There are indications that Farès has on occasion resorted not to textual pyrotechnics of the surrealist-futurist variety of «parole in liberté» (words in freedom) but rather adopted a method much like that which Raymond Roussel admitted to using when composing his works. In other words, the flow of words begins to dictate its own lateral direction or thrust according to the surface value of the words, ignoring what Roland Barthes called the vertical geology underneath the words. Roussel developed his texts by punning and rhyming on words already put down on his paper or even selected from billboards and the like. It looks as though Farès has employed some of the Rousselian dynamics when he writes such things as

Ainsi La liberté de la mère De la mer Qui surgit en
moi Du fond d'une prière Adéquatement Que je vis Ma
première jouissance d'un règne aquatique

(Thus The liberty of the mother Of the sea Which
swells up in me From the depths of a prayer Adequately
Which I live My first rapture in an aquatic reign) (p. 46)

And one cannot help but notice, in the following passage from the same book, the rhymes of «grives» (viz «ivre,» «suivre») and the pun on the word «accord» which in the first instance means «chord,» in the second, «agreement,» and in this case the Evian

Accords

Grives Jeunes Grives Je vais certainement mourir en ce monde Mais Grives Jeunes Grives Le jeune homme continuait de danser sur la route goudronnée *Je suis ivre Ivre IVRE de ce monde* On pouvait suivre les trajectoires Oui Lumineuses Depuis la sortie du blockhaus

Les hommes couraient après leur indépendance, sur la limite aigüe de l'accord, pendant ces trois jours où allait se conclure l'accord

nuits du 16/17

19 mars

62

(Thrushes Young Thrushes I am certainly going to die in this world But Thrushes Young Thrushes The young man went on dancing on the blacktop *I'm drunk Drunk DRUNK from this world* You could follow the trajectories Yes Luminous From the exit of the block-house

The men were running after their independence, on the shrill limit of the chord, during those three days when the accords would be settled

nights of the 16/17

19 March

62 (p 182)

It is true, however, that Fares claims to have adopted this «lateral» evolution in an effort to combat his penchant for observing and documenting minutiae of daily life. On the flyleaf of the book we have been discussing (*Le Champ des oliviers*), there is an author's note which mentions the book's «most rigorous attention to the objectivity of the world we live in,» and in the text itself Farès writes as follows

I arrived in that manner at this notion. That instead of sustaining an historical and psychological form of the *I* I rather had to activate the *lateral* form of an *I* which thereby was no longer the origin of something but rather the moment of passage of an entity greater than it (p 188)

Farès has, as it were, fought his tendency toward casual obser-

vation of the manifest (found in *Yahia, pas de chance* and, especially, in *Un Passager de l'occident*) by adopting a willed concretion based on the text itself. Thus Bonn's characterization of Farès's work as «nonchalant» is true of the early works, but only superficially true of the later works.

In summary, the Revolution continues to be a major shaping force—through both affirmative and negative reaction—in the Algerian literary experience, on the one hand by virtue of having liberated the writers' psyches and, on the other, by lingering on as a national legend whose description is a sure-fire success in the editorial offices of the official press. On the one hand, the liberation of those psyches brought on tensions and confrontations which may be considered «counter-revolutionary» but conducive to good writing, while on the other hand, the approved idiom is monolithic and harmonious in nature but has yielded little other than clichés. Looking to the future, it seems to me that the next decade *must* see a more accommodating attitude on the part of the Algerian press and distribution system if this corpus of literature is to remain a vital entity on the international literary scene. Otherwise, the best talents—eager to keep abreast of literary goings-on in other parts of the world—will stay abroad and drift farther and farther from their origins until we will have either French writers of Algerian origin assimilated into the French literary mode or, possibly, a curious little group of *émigrés* struggling with all their might to hold on to an identity which, in another twenty or thirty years, the majority of Algerians continuing to reside at home will no longer recognize as consistent with their own.

NOTES

1. Aba, *Gazelle apres minuit* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979), p. 10.

All translations in this essay are by me and further references to works cited are made parenthetically in the body of the essay.

- 2 Farès, *Yahia pas de chance* (Paris Editions du Seuil 1970) pp 20 21
- 3 Mammeri *La Mort absurde des Aztèques et le Banquet* (Paris Librairie Académique Perrin 1973) p 16
- 4 Charles Bonn *La Littérature algérienne de langue française et ses lectures* (Ottawa Editions Naaman, 1974), pp 98 99
- 5 In Mammeri, *op cit* p 50
- 6 Quoted in Charles Bonn *op cit* p 224
- 7 Quoted in Bonn p 227
- 8 The material first appeared in Sénac's *Petite Anthologie de la jeune poésie algérienne* (1964 69) published by the Centre Culturel Français in Algiers in 1969 in connection with the poetry reading mentioned in my essay, material made more readily available to readers in 1971 as Number 14 of *Poésie 1* under the title *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie algérienne*
- 9 In Sénac *Anthologie op cit* pp 47 49
- 10 Farès *Un Passager de l'occident* (Paris Editions du Seuil 1971) p 75
- 11 Farès *Le Champ des oliviers* (Paris Editions du Seuil 1972) p 212

SEMBENE'S PROGENY A NEW TREND IN THE SENGALESE NOVEL

Albert Gerard and Jeannine Laurent

Africa's massive output of literary works written in European languages in the course of the last quarter century began in France in the fifties. Its prime motivation had been the negritude ideology, but its most lively source of inspiration, especially among the writers born after the First World War, was an understandably rancorous anticolonialism which could be uttered with impunity now that independence was so obviously around the corner. In Senegalese fiction of this last colonial decade, both writers and protagonists were usually privileged Africans, budding intellectuals thriving on government scholarships. Though their sympathy with the plight of the colonized masses was undoubtedly genuine, there was nevertheless something abstract and doctrinaire about it. Sembène Ousmane was a signal and most unlikely exception. A manual laborer first trained as a fisherman in his native Casamance, a stevedore and trade-union leader in Marseilles, he certainly did not seem to be the stuff that «artists» are made of. Indeed, his first novel, *Le docker noir* (1956), published in the same *annus mirabilis* as Dadié's *Climbié*, Bédi's *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba*, Oyono's *Une vie de boy* and *Le vieux negre et la médaille*, could not but appear as an unconscionably crude story, faulty in structure and language, deprived of any verisimilitude, and oozing racial hatred, a book which had best be forgotten, except as a document for the literary history of Africa.

But *O pays mon beau peuple*¹ (1957) and even more *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960) demonstrated that Ousmane's hitherto doubtful talent had unsuspected capacities for rapid development.

Not only is the latter work of truly epic proportions, carefully constructed and even well-written, but it also exhibits Sembène's uncommon ability to exploit and interpret his own experience and that of his once fellow-workers, the small people, the under-privileged, the proletarians who had none of the lofty metaphysical scruples that Hamidou Kane was to ascribe to the hero of *L'Aventure ambiguë*. These people formed the bulk of the population, their labor provided such wealth as the country might boast, and few of them were capable of articulating their own predicament. However, a sort of group impulse prompted them to claim a larger share of the concrete material rewards that they were producing.

True to his non-conformity, Sembène was not affected by the syndrome which lulled most francophone writers of Africa into silence as independence was dawning. And while *L'Harmattan* (1964) remained the only volume of an intended trilogy, the writer, beginning with *Volatque* (1962) proved that he had become a master of short fiction, producing closely-knit works, tightly structured, packed with devastating irony, and aimed at the new privileged class. This class had partially inherited from the colonial administration and it was establishing in many countries a new social and economic inequality as gross, if not grosser, than the one which had prevailed under the French Empire. Nevertheless, for all the unquestioned mastery he had acquired of the French language and the literary techniques of narrative fiction, writing became for Sembène little more than a hobby, the bulk of his activity being henceforth oriented towards film-making. The reason is not far to seek. Although Senegal is the eldest African daughter of France, whose influence has been pervasive since the seventeenth century, and although it is probably the African country where the French language is most widely spread, the writers of the fifties could only reach a European readership and a paper-thin layer of highly educated black intellectuals. They could not hope to reach what is conventionally and somewhat repulsively called «the masses», that is, the millions of ordinary individuals, illiterate peasants and semi-literate clerks, not to mention the urban workers, still exploited by foreign companies, the unemployed and the beggars. To these Sembène managed to convey his message with movies, where he made abundant use of vernacular languages.

When new writers emerged from the slumber that had sealed their elders' spirits, it was in a Coleridgean mood of dejection as they disenchantedly surveyed the ruins of an African society and

economy wrecked by tribal warfare and military coups, most profitably pilfered by the unholy transactions of the new («national») leaders and the new overseas («multinational») powers, thus reenacting the pattern that had prevailed in the past when the African kings sold their black prisoners to white slave-traders. This was the era of disillusionment, and the new novelists voiced their hopelessness in tones of pity (Malick Fall's *La Plaine* (1967), Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances*, (1968) or of ranting resentment at the black man's inability to take his fate in his own hands (Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence* (1968)).¹ Although some half-hearted efforts were made to africanize the French language and to divest it of the rigidity to which it had been condemned by Richelieu and the old gentlemen of the French Academy, such ambitious works could only be printed in Paris: they had to be designed first and foremost for a western, or at any rate, a westernized audience. Although the disappointed starry-eyed idealism of Williams Sassine was counter-balanced by the more positive, more combative, more optimistic approach of two promising Congolese novelists, Emmanuel Dongala and Henri Lopès, and although the latter's works issued in Cameroon were the most impressive pieces of French prose fiction to have been printed on African soil, it should be pointed out that by the early seventies, when popular literature was thriving in Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya, francophone Africa had not yet produced writers capable of dealing with non-intellectualized modern milieux in simple, straightforward language. Indeed, while Nigerian fiction was increasingly focusing on the predicament and experiences of the urban common man, the basic unit in the constitution of the «masses», there was apparently little prospect of anything of the kind occurring in France's former colonies.

Nevertheless, the foundation of the first two local publishing houses in French-speaking Africa—C L E in Yaoundé, and N E A in Dakar/Abidjan—created the opportunity for a narrative art that would not be written solely with an eye on the French readership, even though no francophone writer, whatever his skin color, can help looking up to Paris for final consecration.² But whereas the C L E writers of the sixties remained mostly concerned with the by now worn-out motifs of tradition vs. innovation and the culture clash in rural societies, the late seventies saw the emergence of several Senegalese writers who turned their attention away from such old-fashioned and increasingly irrelevant pro-

blems, and concentrated as Sembène Ousmane had done, on the plight of the little man or woman in the new, modern, capitalistic, urban society which for a decade had been central to a vast amount of prose fiction in Nigeria and Kenya

One of the forerunners of the new trend was a woman, Aminata Sow Fall, whose novel, *Le Revenant* (1977), refers to a young man who comes back from jail after serving his sentence. Obviously a beginner's work, the tale is convoluted rather than complex. But if the foreign reader does not always find it easy to follow the thread of the story or to grasp the relationships between the various characters, that, because the book is not written primarily for him, but for the Senegalese reader, who is familiar with the clanic hierarchies of his society, who understands allusions to traditional customs and who has no need for explanatory ethnographical footnotes. The hero testifies to a revulsion against both the modern cultured hero with his highbrow problems and the idealized rustic with his idyllic attachment to the worthy phantoms of a past that is now felt to be obsolete. In so doing, however, Ms Sow Fall returned to a form of inspiration that had been at the origin of Senegalese fiction: her «revenant» has been jailed because, in his eagerness to display his importance in the tradition of ostentatious lavishness, he has acquired the necessary money in ways that a modern economy can hardly condone. This, it will be remembered, had been the problem of Ousmane Socé's *Karim*, some forty years earlier. Unfortunately, a comparison of both novels brings out the decline in the quality of French-language teaching since the thirties, and *Le Revenant* lacks the balanced, carefully thought-out structure of *Karim*. But there is a positive side to this: for the difference is between a work produced for a foreign audience by an exceptionally sophisticated member of the Senegalese community, and a more naive and clumsy tale emerging from the grass-roots experience of a hitherto silent majority.

The expectations that *Le Revenant* might have raised were too high, for whereas Ms Sow Fall's second novel, *La Greve des Battu* (1979), centers on beggars (whose role in African Muslim society had been emphasized in Camara Laye's *Le Regard du roi*, in Sembène Ousmane's *Xala* and in Malick Fall's *La Plaine*) it shows only slight improvement over her former work, and functions at a distinctly lower level of artistic achievement than her predecessors'. The story takes place in a modern capital, where an ambitious high official Mour Ndiaye, forbids all beggars to enter

the city center, because they bother foreign tourists. He hopes that this will earn the gratitude of the head of the state and that he will be appointed Vice-President. Harried by the police, the beggars decide to go on strike and to stay in their own district, so that well-to-do citizens are henceforth unable to distribute alms as was their wont and as Allah demands. Strangely, although he has been congratulated by the President, Mour seeks advice from a marabout in order to learn which rites he must go through to become Vice-President. The marabout instructs him to distribute alms in various places inside the city center—where there are no beggars left.

Most unwisely, Ms. Sow Fall has concentrated on the totally uninteresting career of her protagonist, on his ascension from his former job as a minor clerk who has been unemployed for years to his present exalted position. Although the writer casts side-glances at Mour's problems with his wife, ambition is the core of his character and the mainspring of his behaviour. But contradictions abound: rather surprisingly, this African character does not seem to belong to any family or lineage, this politician does not seem to have any political friends, affiliations or doctrine (except for a brief perfunctory statement on p. 8), this westernized individual relies solely on the supernatural powers superstitiously ascribed to the *marabouts*. Nor are minor contradictions lacking. For example, Mour is described (p. 26) as a devout Muslim who distributes alms generously: this makes it difficult to understand his impious decision to keep beggars away from the city center, but elsewhere he appears to be ignorant of the meaning of the word «battù», a beggar's wooden bowl in Wolof (p. 78).¹ Likewise, the townspeople who, at one place are said to have congratulated Mour Ndiaye for ridding the capital of its beggars (p. 68), are elsewhere shown to be at a loss because they are now deprived of the possibility of fulfilling their religious duty of giving alms (pp. 72, 103, 108).

In fact, while the story of Mour Ndiaye contains material for an amusing bitter-sweet short story (but this had been done by Sembène in *Xala*), the theme itself would have provided substance for a full-scale novel if Ms. Sow Fall had shown real interest in the collective response of the citizens to Mour's edict. For the loyal Muslim, alms-giving is a daily religious duty: what happens when he is placed in such a position that he is unable to fulfill this duty and thus forsakes the protection of Allah? This problem is dismissed in a few skeletal hints. On the other hand, it might have been interesting to dwell at length on the beggar community, on the rather

extraordinary (but barely sketched) characters of Salla, the woman who is their leader, and of the consequence for them—both as individuals and as social group—of such awareness as the ordeal may give them that their fate does or does not matter to the town dwellers either they must have an exciting sense of power, or else they must feel deprived of any function in society, as beggars are in the western world. That this societal approach is both feasible and rewarding was demonstrated by Sembène Ousmane in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* two decades ago.

But in order to make her story bulky enough, Ms Sow Fall was prompted to introduce a number of irrelevant sub-plots and elusive minor characters which, one may presume, are intended to give an impression of ebullient everyday life. Examples the problems that arise when Mour marries a second wife fill 20 pages, but they have no connection with the main theme, three pages are devoted to the anger of Mour's daughter against both her father's decision and her mother's resignation, five pages are awarded to the relationship between Mour and his second wife. Even more irrelevantly, more than ten pages focus on Kéba, one of Mour's subordinates, on his childhood reminiscences and his relations with one of his female employees. And the eight pages where Salla, the potentially fascinating female character who is the leader of the beggar community, occupies the front of the stage are stuffed with her memories of days gone by, while her present activities and motivations are left undiscussed.

One might regret that Ms Sow Fall's French, though sedulously correct, resembles too closely class-room French. It is at times clumsily redolent of stilted officialese, and the dialogues are often awkward. Choice examples of quaintness in authorial comments will be found on pp. 45 and 76. But it would be idle to quibble about such minutiae. The significance of these two novels resides in the fact that they heralded the growth and spread of a grassroot inspiration whose pioneers had been Ousmane Socé in *Karim*, Abdoulaye Sadjó and Sembène Ousmane. That they deserve to be regarded as representative rather than exceptional was demonstrated by the publication of Moussa Ly Sangaré's *Sourd-muet, je demande la parole* (1978).

Sangaré's narrative is convincingly presented as an autobiography. According to the blurb, the author was actually born and raised in the Dakar medina, the eleventh child of a poor railwayman, only six of whose sixteen children had a primary

education (pp 48-50) 'In a way, it is an African *Bildungsroman* explaining how this unlikely individual has managed to write a book. It differs from previous works of well-meaning fiction in that Sangaré is an adept writer of clinical realism: he allows the facts to speak for themselves, does not indulge in libertarian rhetoric or moralistic speechifying, refrains from the hasty anthropological generalizations and sociological analyses of the so-called ethnographical novel. The sole exception is a completely useless passage (p 166), where the narrator naively displays his limited knowledge of neurology.

This clinical realism is extremely effective, as Sangaré's «education» is an uninterrupted initiation to the misery and the suffering, the evil and cruelty which are built into human nature, the fountainhead of «man's inhumanity to man».

The environment is one of unrelieved poverty with the medina children playing in the sewers, enjoying their repulsive pranks (p 41). The mother can maintain a semblance of order in the family only by inflicting severe punishments which, however, do not prevent the narrator from loving and respecting her (pp 22-23). Outside the family circle, he is first in touch with the Koranic school, where the teaching is done by one of those sadistic marabouts whose cruelty (pp 9, 18) Hamidou Kane tried to excuse on noble religious grounds in *L'Aventure ambiguë*. This is merely a prelude to his experience at the local primary school (pp 64-72), where he falls victim to the narrow-minded brutality of the schoolteachers and the thoughtless malevolence of the other children. Sangaré's victimizing is by no means due to any angelic meekness of his: the reason is that he is physically a weaker child, unable either to defend himself or to persecute others as he would love to.

When Sangaré reaches his tenth year he is circumcised: this operation and the accompanying ceremonies are described in minute detail (pp 95-113) and seem inordinately barbarous to a western reader, yet, there is no intimation of protest in the aloofness of the clinical narrator, who seems to share (and therefore succeeds in conveying) the widespread fatalism of his society «that's the way it is!» But circumcision is just an intermezzo in Sangaré's school career, which develops in an atmosphere of uninterrupted brutality (pp 155-6) thus appearing as suitable preparation for the harsh treatment that will be meted out to him when he manages to get a job as a carpenter's apprentice.

In consequence of the infinite number of blows that have been

inflicted on him, he becomes a deaf-mute and suffers from severe motory disturbances, leading to the last phase in his initiation five months vainly spent in a hospital in preparation for a surgical operation which is ultimately cancelled, so that Sangaré returns «home» still deaf, still mute, walking with more difficulty than ever, yet finding unexpected strength in his commitment to Muslim fatalism («Of life, nobody is the master», p 176) combined with a kind of biological instinct for survival «one is almost never cured of the virus of hope», p 174)

The key to the peculiar mystery of this book is to be found both in this last episode and in the publisher's blurb during his stay in hospital Sangaré read voraciously It is this (although he does not say so) which must have aroused his latent gifts as a narrator and prompted him to a new calling as a writer In this respect, his talent cannot be denied in spite of minimal formal training and education, he evinces a degree of control over the language which can only have been acquired through abundant and assiduous readings The story-telling technique is inevitably elementary and of linear simplicity But Sangaré knows how to select the right phrasing for the revealing detail, which is at times pathetic (p 22), often repellent (pp 11, 29, 41), occasionally almost too horrible for words (pp 95-113) But although the *dramatis personae* include only two likeable persons—the narrator's father, whose death is one of his most painful losses, and a school-teacher who understands the child's predicament and really tries to help him, albeit in vain (pp 121-24)—the brutish and brutal world of the novel is depicted without hatred it is just taken for granted at times, there's even a touch of humour, as when the narrator recalls his bewilderment at the incredible things he was taught at school about the behaviour of the earth (pp 117-20)

Sangaré's story should probably be regarded as more of a document than a novel Unlike Sembène Ousmane, the writer has no political axe to grind He reports his own experience, thus providing the most impressive image extant in the French language of what life is really like for the majority of under-privileged urbanized Africans—an image which confirms the more overtly fictional statements of Ekwensi in Nigeria, Duodu in Ghana or Kibera in Kenya That such a trend was beginning to take root in Senegal was confirmed when another female writer, Mariama Bâ, published *Une si longue lettre* (1979) But while Sangaré's technique recalls Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* because it records the narrator's past ex-

periences, Mariama Bâ's is reminiscent of Diderot's *La Religieuse*, being likewise an autobiographical tale in the form of a «long letter»

The letter writer is a widowed mother of 12, Ramatoulaye, an elementary-school teacher, who describes her present predicament and past experience for the benefit of a friend of hers, Aïssatou. We learn from the dust-jacket that Mariama Bâ has long been active in feminist movements in Senegal, and the book focuses on the condition of women in the present transitional stage of African Islamic societies.

Ramatoulaye married Moudo, a civil servant with a law degree in the face of stiff opposition from her family because he was not rich enough, and they wanted to marry her off to a wealthy but considerably older man. Throughout her married life, she has been caught between the professional demands of her job, her pride in her work, the need to supplement the income of her husband on the one hand, and on the other hand her absorbing duties as a wife, a housewife and an incongruously fecund mother. After she has given birth to her twelfth child, Moudo decides to take a second, much younger, wife (Binetou) as he is entitled to according to Islam and by custom. But contrary to Muslim precept, he abandons Ramatoulaye and squanders all their earnings on Binetou. In other words, the narrator is steeped in the contradictions of a society emerging from a subsistence economy (where polygamy and limitless fecundity make sound sense) into a western-type money economy which offers women openings for more rewarding work than the daily household chores, while comparative affluence encourages and enables men to indulge their lustful whims in complete disregard of the compensatory duties built into true Muslim law.

But Ramatoulaye's fate (which she has accepted with sorrow and meek resignation) is only one sample of the various individual situations which can arise from the present state of Senegalese society. And Ms Bâ skillfully introduces welcome diversity in her story, while at the same time providing more extensive coverage of her country's social reality, by reporting the experience of other women, who react differently to similar situations.

Examples on the one hand Ramatoulaye fondly reminisces about the very different behaviour of her correspondent, Aïssatou, who rebelled when her husband (prompted by his family) took a second wife: she got a divorce, and recovered her freedom and her

dignity On the other hand, her friend from the Ivory Coast, Jacqueline, proved incapable either of resignation or of rebellion, and turned psychotic (pp 63-6) ' Nor is the younger generation omitted Ms Bâ describes her narrator's consternation as a mother facing emancipated daughters who have lost all respect for custom and religion, who smoke, or become pregnant though still unmarried! Ramatoulaye finds it difficult to condone the behaviour of her own daughter Daba, who is incensed at her father's conduct and mocks him by patronizing the same nightclub with her fiancé, their mere youthful presence a cruelly ironic comment on the ill-assorted couple Modou-Binetou Ramatoulaye can even identify with her younger rival Binetou, who was in no position to reject her comfortably wealthy but ridiculous elderly «suitor» not because her family drives her to this marriage, but because she cannot resist the impulses which the consumer society has grafted upon the original shame culture In this, Binetou is different from the second wife of Aïssatou's husband, who has been brought up in a traditional village and merely complies with custom

For a first novel, *Une si longue lettre* demonstrates remarkable mastery of the French language A rather unfortunate sentence (p 61), a few samples of artificially sententious or journalistic style when the writer lapses into general abstractions (pp 90-1, 107-8 129), do not detract from the classical simplicity of Ms Bâ's writing which however, is not lacking in variety The epistolary form she has adopted does not prevent her from introducing stylistic variety in compliance with a diversity of characters and situation which covers the highly complex problems of African womanhood in the present and difficult times Finally, she has a fine sense of humour and irony The letter-writer can describe her own behaviour with lucid raillery (p 62), she provides a moderately exaggerated caricature of some outdated Islamic customs (pp 10 et seq) and there is an uproarious brief description of her elderly husband wriggling in his youthful tight jeans in the hope of attracting Binetou's appreciation (p 72)

Those Senegalese novels of the late seventies do not display the artistry that was so conspicuous in the works of such of their elders as Ousmane Socé, Birago Diop or Hamidou Kane, all of them university graduates trained in France, or even as Abdoulaye Sadjó, a school-teacher educated at the Ecole Normale William-Ponty Yet they are vastly superior to the painful half-literate bootlicking

of Bakary Diallo in *Force Bonté* or to the ungrammatical racist invectives of Sembène Ousmane in *Le Docker noir*. It is much to be deplored that there is no French equivalent to the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa, which has helped so many English-language African writers, or to Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* and the numerous other treatises and handbooks (including Ezekiel Mphahlele's) that have appeared in the last two decades: these might have taught budding French-language novelists how to avoid the elementary technical blunders to which they are inevitably liable. It is to be hoped that a few of them at least will follow in the footsteps of Sembène Ousmane, and learn how to contrive a good plot, build up a scene, create convincing characters, arrange a satisfactory ending, cut off loose ends, write plausible dialogue, etc.

Such as they are, however, with their constantly touching sincerity and the occasional stylistic awkwardness, those writers are indicative of new trend in francophone African literature. First, they demonstrate that the establishment of the Nouvelles Éditions Africaines in Dakar has created material opportunities for authors who would have experienced considerable difficulty in having their works published in Paris. The example of the former British colonies has shown most decisively how important local publishing houses can be for the literary development of the new African countries. This had been confirmed by the encouragement which the setting up of the Centre de Littérature Evangélique (C L E) in Cameroon had given to writers of French, especially in Cameroon itself and in the Congo. With a few exceptions, like Henri Lopès from Congo, CLE writers, however, had been prone to limit themselves to the folk themes of rural life, and the culture-clash problems connected with the bride-price. Modern city life was mostly dealt with in terms of Mongo Beti's «ville cruelle» cliché.

With what will perhaps come to be known as the Dakar school, French prose fiction seems at last to have integrated experiences and attitudes that had been spreading in the anglophone writing of West and East Africa since Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954). The gist of their inspiration consists in the writers' assurance that traditional Africa is finished: nostalgic chimeras about maintaining cherished traditions are irrelevant and the idyllic expectation of a syncretic «civilization de l'universel» is equally illusory. With independence Africa has reached a point of no return, and if the new states are to survive at all they will inexorably be

compelled to submit to the overwhelming power of what the West fondly describes as its «civilization» For the new writers, this is not a matter for discussion or speculation It is a fact of life which can only be taken for granted The function of the novelist therefore is simply to illustrate the social, psychological and ethical consequences of a situation whose deeper causes and trends he or she feels unable (and perhaps unwilling) to counteract or even to question

The clinical realism characteristic of the new generation of writers obviously meets the needs and fulfills the expectations of a new class of local readers, who are neither highbrow nor illiterate, and who find in such works a faithful recognizable reflection of their own experience as citizens of a new Africa They are described as subjected to the advantages and the evils of «modern civilization», to the delights, the perplexity and the corruption inherent in a market economy focusing on consumerism, and to the pleasures, the solitude and cruel impersonality of megalopolis life In so doing, the new Senegalese novelists hark back to the pre-negritudinous tradition of Ousmane Socé's *Karim* and of Abdoulaye Sadjó's *Maïmouna* and *Nini* They are the uncommitted children of the Sembène Ousmane who have inherited his compassion with ordinary people together with his sense of facts, his rejection of starry-eyed idealization, and his grasp and acceptance of the realities of history Perhaps because they are his juniors by nearly a quarter century, because the struggle against colonialism ended before they had reached the age of intellectual awareness, because in Africa even more than in the West these are times of bleakness not only for the underprivileged but for those who are simply non-privileged, they have relinquished Sembène's doctrinaire engagement of the early sixties Whether this feature will prove lasting or not is of course an open question It may be that the young Senegalese writers will some time come to agree with their Nigerian contemporary, playwright and critic Femi Osofisan's assertion that «lucidity is inadequate, may even be fraudulent, if its consequence is mere 'intoxication' and if finally, it only results in perpetuating a philosophy of defeat»⁶ Whatever the future may hold in store, the sudden growth of grass-root inspiration in the French-language novel must be regarded as an important step in the historical development of Senegalese literature

NOTES

- 1 The various trends in francophone writing at the turn of the decade have been disentangled by Nicole Medjigbodo in a paper to be included in Albert S. Gérard (ed.), *A History of African Literature in European Languages* (forthcoming). Of special cogency is Zairian scholar Mbelolo ya Mpiku's essay «From One Mystification to Another 'Negritude' and 'négraille' in *Le Devoir de violence* » *Review of National Literatures* 2 (1971) 11, 124-47. See also Emile Snyder «Le malaise des dépendances. Aperçus du nouveau roman africain d'expression française » *Présence francophone* 12 (1976) 69-76. For a discussion of a similar mood in English writing see notably Emmanuel Obiechina «Post Independence Disillusionment in Three African Novels » in Bernth Lindfors and Ulla Schild (eds.), *Neo African Literature and Culture* (Wiesbaden: Heymann, 1976), pp. 119-46.
- 2 Some useful information will be found in Philippe Leymarie «CLE: la première maison d'édition en Afrique francophone » *Afrique Littéraire et Artistique* 44 (1978), 64-65 and in Fredric Michelman «New Life for Francophone Publishing in Africa » *African Book Publishing Record* 4 (1978) 163-67.
- 3 Page references are to Aminata Sow Fall, *La Grève des battus* (Dakar: Abidjan Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1979).
- 4 Page references are to Moussa Ly Sangaré, *Sourd muet je demande la parole* (Dakar: Abidjan Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1978).
- 5 Page references are to Mariama Bâ, *Une si longue lettre* (Dakar: Abidjan Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1979).
- 6 Femi Osofisan, «Anubis Resurgent: Chaos and Political Vision in Recent Literature,» *Le Français au Nigeria* 10 (1975), 11, 13-23.

EVEMBE'S *SUR LA TERRE EN PASSANT* AND THE POETICS OF SHAME

RICHARD BJORNSON
The Ohio State University

When François-Borgia Marie Evembe's *Sur la terre en passant* published in 1966, it received glowing reviews and a prestigious literary prize.¹ The first edition sold out quickly. Since then, this provocative first novel has never been reprinted, and few critics have accorded it much attention.² This neglect is unfortunate, because Evembe has imaginatively depicted a social and psychological phenomenon of enormous significance for Post-Independence Africa. As traditional culture and economic organization lose their hold over village life, thousands of young people flock to overcrowded urban areas, but there are jobs for very few of them, and those who do find work often discover that their new situation demands moral compromise and breeds a different kind of anxiety. This is precisely what happens to Iyoni, the protagonist in Evembe's novel, and to the extent that he is caught in a web of socio-economic forces which shape the destinies of countless individuals in a large number of African countries, his story is a typical one—so mundane that it would hardly merit a mention in the Cameroon newspapers for which Evembe has worked during the past fifteen years. However, by employing a direct, concrete idiom perfectly suited to the hallucinatory qualities and scabrous details of one particular man's experience of life under these circumstances, Evembe shocks readers into an awareness of the intense suffering which is inflicted routinely on young Africans by this process. He also makes the state of consciousness behind this particular man's tragedy come alive. Characterized by vivid sense impressions and a preoccupation with nausea and filth,

Iyoni's thoughts are permeated by an omnipresent sense of shame, and it is this shame that Evembe weaves into a satirical yet philosophical meditation on the vitality of the human spirit under duress and on its yearning for love and truth in an imperfect world. In effect, he has fashioned a poetics of shame from the ordinary experiences of daily life in a large African city.

In the language of his native Kribi, Iyoni's name literally means «shame», and after coming to the Cameroon capital Yaoundé in search of a government job, he finds it impossible to escape the emotion suggested by his name. Near the beginning of his stay in the city, he falls ill. In his weakened condition, he is obliged to depend on the charity of friends for the basic necessities of life. Although he is shy, indecisive and passive, he is also idealistic, sensitive and proud. He never wants to appear ridiculous in the eyes of other people and therefore continually strives to maintain a dignified pose. Despite dizziness and fatigue, he struggles to stand erect. When asked about his failure to keep a doctor's appointment, he claims to have been on a business trip, although he was unemployed at the time. In the flirtatious Marie-Chantal's apartment, he feigns nonchalance to camouflage his nervousness. In each case, he is attempting to make others believe in a masculine dignity he does not actually possess. Nevertheless, he recognizes the insubstantiality of his pretensions and feels ashamed of them. In fact, he is always and everywhere ashamed—ashamed of his dependency, ashamed of a perishable, ridiculous body that refuses to obey his commands to adopt dignified poses, ashamed of clothes that brand him an outsider in respectable society, ashamed of a life in which he has accomplished nothing at an age when Napoleon had conquered half of Europe, but most of all, he is ashamed of being ashamed.

Iyoni's mysterious illness is never specifically identified, it might be chronic diarrhea or dysentery or even the cancer he fears. The crucial point is not the name of the disease, but the fact that something is causing his body to eject clots of blood and horrible chunks of decaying organic matter. Whatever that something might be, it is not only physical, it is also spiritual, and it has been caused by conditions imposed on him by the same forces that are tearing apart the fabric of traditional African society. The two most important of these forces are urbanization and bureaucratization. As Cameroon moved from a subsistence economy rigidly controlled by French colonial authorities to a money economy administered by

an indigenous elite and supported by French financial and political interests, thousands of Iyoni migrated to the cities, where they hoped to achieve respectability and all that it promises—marriage, decent clothes, food, medical care, a home, self-esteem. The largest industry in many of these cities is a government bureaucracy in which positions are allocated on the basis of personal and political connections. Those without jobs have little incentive for performing their tasks conscientiously, because there is no relationship between the work they do and the rewards they receive. Thus, even when Iyoni obtains a well-paying position in one of the ministries, he cannot help but feel ashamed of his own impotence in the face of a pervasive greed, superficiality and corruption. The result is a profound malaise which nothing can dispel. Shortly after obtaining his position and moving into a highly respectable apartment, he suffers a relapse of his earlier illness and dies. Obviously, no amount of individual wealth or political influence could have cured Iyoni's illness, because it was merely one symptom of a larger social disorder.

Against the pressures exerted on him by that disorder, Iyoni struggles to uphold his conviction that people are more than physical bodies and that they can create their own meaning and purpose on this earth. His models of behavior are Christ, the man of love, and Napoleon, the man of action. Although he is incapable of emulating either of them, he dreams of harmonizing their examples by resacralizing day-to-day existence without divorcing himself from physical and political realities. Despite the hypocrisy and corruption of the institutionalized church, he feels drawn toward the cathedral, where the singing, incense and ceremonial magnificence of the Mass rekindle in him a profoundly peaceful sentiment of wonder and awe.⁹ He knows that contemporary Africans must preserve such sentiments if they hope to survive spiritually. He also knows that a better society could come into being if people oriented their lives around the love and compassion preached by Christ, who also lived and suffered «sur la terre en passant.» The poetic sensitivity and idealism with which he sustains this conviction makes a definite impression upon those who know him. His best friend Abelekongo, his patron Nkilviagah, and even Marie-Chantal sense that Iyoni possesses an extremely valuable human quality that is largely absent from contemporary Cameroon society. Unlike Christ, he offers man no redemption from the sins of the world, but his life does have exemplary significance,

it demonstrates that living in a state of mind characterized by love and forgiveness can exert an influence over others, reawakening in them hints of human qualities they have been conditioned to repress

Yet Iyoni realizes that good intentions alone are inadequate. An exercise of Napoleonic will is also necessary. Just to remain alive, he himself must often call upon the utmost self-control. For example, when he collapses on the floor of a toilet stall in the Yaounde Central Hospital, he becomes covered with vomit and excrement, he pleads for help, but two bystanders rush away, pointedly refusing to notice his suffering. The image is one of the most disgusting in contemporary African literature, and Iyoni himself, overcome by weakness and pain, finds it difficult to believe in anything. Yet he vaguely realizes that he must struggle, and that in his struggle lies the only meaning and purpose he can know at that moment. By extension, it becomes evident to him that a similar effort is necessary, if the country is to pull itself out of the social quagmire into which it has been settling. In this context, the example of Napoleon is relevant. Through political engagement and an exercise of will, he had tried to create a more just society in which careers would be open to all men of talent. This is the path Iyoni desires to follow by seeking a government position, because he dreams of projecting his personal morality of love and compassion onto the larger social fabric.

But he is too weak to attain his dream, and an acute awareness of this weakness heightens his sense of shame, for when his body proves too fragile a vehicle for his message, he can't help but feel unworthy of pursuing his ideal. To believe in the possibility of a more humane social order, Iyoni must remain convinced that he himself is more than a mechanically functioning body that ingests food and expels disgusting particles of blood and excrement. If he were no more than that, his ideas of love, beauty, honesty, and poetry would be illusions, and his vision of a world in which people created their own meanings and purposes would be a mere chimera. For this reason he must constantly struggle against the doubts which challenge an idealistic conception of his own humanity. The scenes where he imagines his body as a disintegrating factory are particularly significant in this respect, because they indicate that Iyoni has begun to define himself as if he were a mechanical object and not a feeling, loving, dreaming human being. When he momentarily acquiesces in this reductionist image of himself, he

becomes susceptible to an intensified sense of shame that has nothing to do with his poverty, his Blackness, his Africanness, or the corruption of Cameroon social institutions. It is the shame of anyone who believes in a transcendent idea, a perfect love, or an ideal beauty and yet feels irrevocably tied to an ugly, impotent, decaying body. If he ever completely surrenders to his shame, he will lose his rationale for being «sur la terre en passant». In fact, when he dies, his death signifies not only the body's failure to continue functioning, but also a loss of belief in his capacity to live up to his image of himself.

The existing social framework contributes to Iyoni's demoralization in two important ways. It directly exerts pressure on him to regard himself as a non-entity, and it makes him ashamed of having been born in a country where people have become oblivious to the most natural and beautiful aspects of their own lives, rejecting love and compassion, while espousing artificial, materialistic criteria for distinguishing between good and evil. In the early stages of the novel, the structural inequities of chronic unemployment in a neo-colonialist environment impose on him the abject poverty that aggravates his illness. At one point, he can't even find the eight cents he needs each day to still the hunger pangs in his stomach. However, an even greater damage is inflicted on him by the lack of concern with which he is treated by hospital attendants, doctors, doormen, secretaries and others who deny his claims on their common humanity. Iyoni feels superfluous when nearly everyone rebuffs him and implicitly rejects his ideals. His personal sense of shame is further intensified by encounters with this insensitivity, and such experiences are in turn linked with depression and relapses of his physical illness. On one level, the basic injustice of the new social order and the loss of compassion accompanying the breakdown of traditional value systems threaten to annihilate Iyoni physically; on another, they erode his confidence in the possibility that dreams of a better world can ever be realized.

If Evembe were concerned only with the physical dimensions of Iyoni's dilemma, he would have allowed his protagonist to prosper after being appointed to his position in the ministry. After all, he is earning an enormous salary and enjoying all the perquisites of bureaucratic respectability—free housing, an automobile, guaranteed loans. Yet the experiences he undergoes just before he begins to reap the benefits of this position oblige him to recognize the institutional pressures that will continue to frustrate his

spiritual needs. The first of these experiences occurs during a lavish party at his patron's villa. The money spent on such entertainment could have nourished thousands of jobless men—men just like Iyoni. However, as wealth and political influence become dominant symbols of status in contemporary African society, the traditional sense of community (which would have extended to these men) is being replaced by an acquisitive individualism characteristic of Western urban culture. Combined with an arbitrary system of rewards in the bureaucracy, this new value system produces an artificial hierarchy in which people's positions are determined not by what they are or by what they do, but by what they possess and by the titles they hold.

To suppress the fear that there is no real justification for their own status and privilege, the people who procure government jobs, like the guests at Nkilviagah's party, disguise their inadequacies and physical deformities beneath elaborate Western clothes and an exaggerated show of respect for money and titles. The result is a society of masks and lies—a society where something extremely valuable is in danger of being lost forever. The guests at Nkilviagah's party perform the latest European dance steps, which appear mechanical and contrived in comparison with the spontaneous exuberance and communal spirit of traditional African dancing. In such a setting, Iyoni feels excluded. Ashamed of his shabby clothes and lack of status, he refrains from inviting any of the elegantly dressed women to dance and ultimately withdraws to the kitchen, where he eats and drinks in solitude. The scene reveals the degree to which Iyoni is estranged from the ruling elite of the country. He himself has accomplished nothing, but these people, who have so much more power than he does, lack the vision and sensitivity to even conceive of the goals he yearns to achieve. In attempting to preserve their false and fragile self-images, they merely perpetuate a system that threatens to engulf him and everything for which he stands.

Nkilviagah provides an excellent example of what happens to talented, principled individuals who become deeply involved in the webs of intrigue that constitute the exercise of power in newly independent African countries. In the language of the Ngɔumba (an ethnic group living east of Yaoundé), his name means «our father-in-law» and connotes a grandiose benefactor. He is the «great man» with numerous diplomas and a large popular following, but he has not been able to remain morally pure while engaging in

politics. Although Nkivilagah senses a special quality in Iyoni and eventually elevates him to an important position in his own ministry, he is also capable of overlooking his protégé's suffering in times of need. His politician's smile is redolent with false promises, and even his preferential treatment of Iyoni reflects the nepotism so injurious to the cohesiveness of contemporary African society. In short, Nkivilagah is an ambiguous character. Iyoni had responded to his friendship by idealizing him in the hope that his own visions of a more humane society might be realized, if he could work for a man who shared his values. Without Nkivilagah, Iyoni is powerless. He needs to believe in his patron in order to believe in the possibility of his own aspirations. Yet Nkivilagah could never live up to Iyoni's image of him, and the sensitive young man's awareness of that fact is one of the primary reasons behind his eventual loss of hope.

Iyoni's experiences at the party and his dealings with Nkivilagah give him an insight into the workings of government bureaucracy and its perversion of decent human values. The final scenes make him painfully aware that cruelty and hypocrisy characterize the very institutions which purport to uphold the values he cherishes. Near the end of the novel, he attends Mass at the Yaoundé Cathedral. The church is one place where he might expect to be treated with Christian compassion, but when he faints, not one among thousands of worshippers practices the charity being preached from the pulpit. After laboriously wending his way out of the cathedral, he stumbles and falls in the street, where a policeman (the symbolic representative of justice in the state) accuses him of public drunkenness and kicks him mercilessly in the small of the back. This beating and the indifference of the church goers contribute to the breakdown of Iyoni's body and spirit. The result is another relapse. During his illness, friends and colleagues ignore him, but as soon as he has been named departmental attaché in Nkivilagah's ministry, they besiege him with protestations of friendship and expressions of concern for his well-being. He is ashamed for them and for a society in which their subterfuges and compromises prevail over his own ideals of honesty and compassion, thus, despite his success in social terms, he can see little reason for pursuing his mission on this earth. Shame and hopelessness conquer his will to live, and he dies.

Iyoni's proposed synthesis of Napoleonic will and Christian love may be impossible in Post-Independence Africa. The crucial

issue is not whether he lives or dies or succeeds in changing Cameroon society. What is important is that, in the midst of physical and spiritual decay, he discovers within himself the imagination to conceive of a better world and the force of character to work toward its realization. The moral goodness of which he dreams will never be found in institutions or intellectual movements, but only in people. If people would behave honestly, shun artificial distinctions, and commiserate with each other as «brothers» in the African sense of the word, a new order could arise. On several occasions, Iyoni receives the modicum of encouragement he needs to counter the internal doubts and external pressures that continually assail him. As a suffering human being, he offers a choice to everyone whom he encounters. Most choose to ignore him, although some go out of their way to brutalize or humiliate him, and a few actually help him. It is from these few that he imbibes the courage to go on. For example, weakened by a severe attack of his illness and spurned by hospital employees and patients alike, he is staggering through the corridors of the Yaoundé Central Hospital, when he collapses into the arms of a nameless young girl who comes to his aid. A blinding sun beats down on them, and passersby look on indifferently, but she exerts all her strength to hold him up, as she weeps silently in frustration and compassion. Her gesture and tears create in him the impression that a strong bond of human feeling unites them, and the awareness of this bond is as necessary to him as her physical presence, because it reaffirms his belief in an idealistic vision of human potential. Without this belief he would no longer have any desire to live, for he regards his mission on this earth as a duty to help others realize what human life can be, when it is not distorted by hypocrisy, greed and selfish individualism. However, as he recognizes shortly before he dies, urbanization and bureaucratization have fostered the emergence of institutions and attitudes which threaten to prevent the development of a productive, compassionate, self-respecting society in which individuals might relate to each other in morally responsible ways. One of the greatest tragedies in contemporary Africa is the enormous waste of human potential that results from this situation. In his novel, Evembe is attempting to make readers aware of this tragedy and of the fact that it does not have to take place.

The importance of Evembe's subject matter and the power of his style help to explain the initially favorable reception of *Sur la*

terre en passant, but the same qualities also provoked the relative oblivion into which it has subsequently fallen. By identifying the causes of the hero's physical and spiritual malaise, Evembe has called into question the conventional wisdom of three well-established institutions—the church, the state, and the Négritude movement. Because these institutions exercise considerable influence over intellectual life in Cameroon and in francophone West Africa, their neglect or rejection of the novel contributed significantly to the lack of critical attention it has received.⁵ The Catholic Church could hardly be expected to sanction the physically disgusting details by means of which Evembe characterizes his hero's state of consciousness or the implicit charge that most people who proclaim the Christian faith fail to act in Christian ways, in fact, Evembe's novel was severely criticized in the Cameroon press for irreverence and an alleged lack of respect for humane values.⁶ The ruling elites of independent African countries would also feel uncomfortable with Evembe's novel once they understood his satiric portrayals of government bureaucracy or his condemnations of the materialistic assumptions on which their own power and prestige are based. Such a novel could not, for example, have been published in Cameroon. Finally, proponents of Négritude would find it difficult to accept the manner in which Evembe denies the uniqueness and redemptive value of the Black experience. For him, Africans have no special dispensations in confronting pain and death, in fact, they themselves often play a predominant role in the perpetuation of corrupt, dehumanizing social systems. Like Ayi Kwei Armah, Malick Fall, and Ahmadou Kourouma, Evembe emphasizes the underside of contemporary African life as a means of drawing attention to this situation. Although such an emphasis makes them all vulnerable to accusations of pessimism and betrayal of Black solidarity, their message is a crucial one, and Africans who ignore it will do so at their own peril.

There is no natural constituency for the sort of novel Evembe has written, and his anti-establishment stance has cost him the sympathetic attention of many influential readers. When properly understood, however, his writing reflects the attempt to fuse a highly personal sensibility with a universalistic faith in every individual's capacity for love, compassion, and dignity. Evembe himself is convinced that there are no new stories to tell and that, if the old stories are retold in the traditional way, there is no sense in writing them down. What remains worth doing is to forge the con-

ventional elements of language into a voice capable of expressing individual identity in such a way that it can be understood by people as people and not as believers in any specific institutionalized mode of thought. This is what he attempts to do in *Sur la terre en passant*. The very pretext for the existence of the story is an anonymous friend's wish to record Iyoni's life and communicate its unusual quality to others. This fictive narrator is an intelligent, sensitive African who empathizes with another intelligent, sensitive African, contemplating his pathetic fate and trying to find some meaning in it. The result is a tone of overwhelming sadness at the spectacle of a wasted life and an accusatory insistence that people wake up to the hypocrisy, corruption and absence of compassion that torment Iyoni and people like him throughout Africa. This sadness and this anger are direct expressions of the sensibility Evembe desires to communicate.

The surface ugliness of the details registered by this sensibility has undoubtedly prevented many readers from recognizing the profoundly religious thrust of *Sur la terre en passant*. Like Camus and Kafka, Evembe weaves a series of implicit questions into a deceptively simple parable of man's attempt to find meaning and value in the absurd, accidental circumstances of an individual life. What is the point of living when pain and bodily excretions dominate one's consciousness, when identity is defined solely in terms of wealth and rank in arbitrary social hierarchies, when no one cares if a person lives or dies? If there is no inherent purpose in human existence, is any behavior legitimate—lying to one's «brothers,» cheating them, indifferently watching them suffer? The answer to these questions is suggested by Iyoni's humanistic ideal, which is potentially capable of sustaining individuals trapped in revolting, dehumanizing environments. To simply deny the existence of ugly realities would be, in Evembe's eyes, hypocritical and dishonest. His insistence on portraying them does not indicate that he revels in filth and excrement. On the contrary, it suggests that he himself is an idealist who has been deeply hurt by the disparity between the society which exists and the community of love and trust which could exist, if people would stop perverting their own lives and the lives of others whom they ignore or exploit. Out of this hurt has come an angry novel which seeks to provoke readers by directly confronting them with the horror and filth to which they have become accustomed. Yet beneath the anger is a calm awareness that there is a plane on which love and beauty and honesty exist even in

the most debased of worlds Evembe distances himself from the institutionalized church, its dogma and the injustices perpetrated in its name, but a deeply religious attitude toward life continues to motivate his view of the world In *Sur la terre en passant*, the scatological details must be seen within the context of a desperate hope that the humiliation and suffering they represent are not inevitable—that a fundamental change in the underlying belief system could bring about a more just and humane society In conjunction with a belief that the individual human character is inherently worth writing about, this hope defines the positive dimension of Evembe's poetics of shame

NOTES

1 *Sur la terre en passant* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1966) was awarded the Grand Prix Littéraire de l'Afrique Noire in 1967 by the Association des Ecrivains de Langue Française (ADELF) for the best work of African fiction to have appeared during the previous year

2 Brief discussions of *Sur la terre en passant* have appeared in Robert Cornevin, *Littératures d'Afrique noire de langue française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976) and Dorothy S. Blair, *African Literature in French: A History of Creative Writing in French from West and Equatorial Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). A somewhat more comprehensive treatment is contained in Jean Pierre Gourdeau, «Quelques mots de *Sur la terre en passant* de François Borgia Marie Evembe,» *Annales de l'Université d'Abidjan*, série D 7 (1974) pp. 180-84, but like Cornevin and Blair, Gourdeau restricts himself to an appreciative summary of the book's plot.

3 Evembe's attitude toward religion is extremely complex. His father left a Catholic seminary after having been accused of a sin he did not commit. At that time the local bishop swore that, if the elder Evembe ever married and broke his vows of celibacy, he would never have male children. Four years later, he carried his first-born son to the bishop, who christened him François Borgia Marie in honor of the «divine intercession» which had supposedly made possible the birth of a male child. Although the bishop's arbitrariness and fallibility were obvious, the young boy's father did not renounce his Christian ideals. He sent his son to the Catholic mission school in Kribi, where the kindly Father Carré inspired him with a lasting respect for the life of the mind within a Christian context of love, humility, and charity. Later, at the Collège Liebermann in Douala, Evembe studied French literature under the

poet priest Henri de Julliot, who wakened in him the desire to become a writer. Although moved by de Julliot's love of literature, Evembe felt stifled by his teacher's aesthetic principles, which he considered overly restrictive to permit the expression of an authentic African sensibility. When he wrote *Sur la terre en passant* he was in part reacting against the education he had received in de Julliot's classroom. As a result of these experiences, Evembe developed a highly ambivalent attitude toward the church. On the one hand, the actions of particular clergymen made him suspicious of institutionalized religion; on the other, he was profoundly influenced by the religious feelings he experienced or saw exemplified in the lives of men like his father and Carré, whom he greatly admired.

4 Throughout *Sur la terre en passant* Evembe has employed characteristic names from different areas of Cameroon to suggest the heterogeneity of the urban population. The French names of the women at Nkivilagah's party are also significant for they indicate the degree to which Cameroonians have adopted Westernized ways of identifying themselves.

5 In francophone Africa, the publication and distribution of books are largely under the control of these institutions. Although *Sur la terre en passant* was originally brought out by Présence Africaine, which was founded by members of the Négritude movement, the editors decided against publishing a second edition, when the book's anti-Négritude thrust became apparent. The inheritors of the Négritude movement (as well as the governments of Senegal and Ivory Coast) are strongly represented in one of the two other important publishers of francophone African literature, Nouvelles Éditions Africaines (NEA). The final major publishing house—Éditions CLE in Yaoundé—is a church-sponsored enterprise which submits to *de facto* governmental censorship.

6 One of the most vociferous critics of Evembe's novel was his former teacher de Julliot, whose critical review in the *Cameroon Tribune* attacked the novel for its lack of style, its emphasis upon the most disgusting aspects of life, and its failure to communicate an edifying image of the human spirit.

**POLITICS AND THE NEW AFRICAN NOVEL.
A STUDY OF THE FICTION OF
FRANCIS BEBEY**

W CURTIS SCHADE
Indiana University

Abiola Irele, writing ten years ago, characterized the previous two decades of the African novel as «moving in a single direction, that is towards a comprehensive exploration of the implications, social and spiritual, of the African encounter with the West »¹ One could further narrow the scope of this generalization and consider the question of politics to be of central concern to the majority of African novelists In doing so I will borrow Irving Howe's definition of a political novel as «a novel in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting »² While almost tautological, this definition serves to distinguish the approach used here from broader notions, such as that of Camara Laye

One does not have to talk about specific political problems in order to be political All literature is, in a sense, «committed» in the way in which it asserts the style of a particular culture and way of life

From its inception in the early 1950's, Francophone African fiction has been strongly marked by political themes During the final years preceding independence the works of Mongo Béti and Ferdinand Oyono sharply stated the case against the denigration of African values inherent in all aspects of the European colonial system Their works, published in France, were primarily aimed at a European audience and helped to awaken the consciences of French people to the evils being perpetrated by their government

With the coming of independence their anti-colonialist message and often satirical style gave way to writings reflecting other political themes, focusing upon the drama of the transition of power and subsequent black rule. Whether optimistic or disillusioned, many of these novels featured real events and people, often only thinly disguised, and sought to give an inside view of that historic moment. Other related tendencies developed in the late 1960's, most notably a strongly autocritical, often radical, body of fiction represented by such writers as Sembène Ousmane and Alioum Fanta Touré, and the more distant, philosophical study of society and politics of a writer such as Ahmadou Kourouma. In all of these examples it is the contemporary political situation, whether viewed globally or as it affects the life of a single, often faceless, individual, which is the primary moving force within the novel.

While political concerns continue to exert strong influence on African fiction today—one thinks of the most recent works by Sembène Ousmane, Mongo Béti (his last two novels are really nothing more than fictionalized versions of his political exposé, *Main basse sur le Cameroun*), Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, and of the militant literature coming out of Southern Africa—there is another trend, especially noticeable in African writing of French expression, away from this predominance of political concerns. The fiction published by les Editions CLE, Yaounde, Cameroon, serves to illustrate this point. Of the twenty novels published between 1966-1977, only two could have been seen as profoundly political, while over half deal primarily with themes of love, sexuality and marriage, three with the «new African woman,» and three with study-related trips to Europe, the remainder defying classification. Political themes are not completely absent from these works, but are subordinated to other aspects of life.

I would like to focus more closely on the fiction of CLE's finest writer, Francis Bebey, in an attempt to explore the ways in which this recent fiction, while continuing to deal with political concerns, does so in a significantly different light than its predecessors. Bebey's literary success makes him an obvious representative of the newer generation of African writers. *Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio*, for example, won the Grand Prix Littéraire de l'Afrique Noire in 1968, is now in its seventh French-language edition, and has been translated into at least four languages.

The works by Bebey which offer the most interest in this regard are his three novels, *Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio* (1967), *La*

Poupée ashanti (1973), and *Le Roi Albert d'Effidi* (1976), and one short-story, «Assisastanas et le commissaire de police,» from the collection of short-stories and poems *Embarras et Cie*, published in 1968. I propose to look at these four pieces, first noting the political elements in each and then discussing the importance of these elements in Bebey's writing.

The earliest written of these, the short-story «Assisastanas et le commissaire de police,» is the only story from *Embarras et Cie* which portrays in any detail the European occupation of Africa. Not only is it set during the colonial period, but the elements of conflict between Europeans and Africans are sharply drawn. The story in brief is this: Eléna, a white woman, is unfaithful to her Greek husband, Assisastanas, taking as an occasional lover Evindi, the African hairdresser who comes to her house every Thursday to do her hair. Jean Neuf, the much feared police chief, discovers this and has Evindi badly beaten, thrown in prison for a month, and then sent off to forced labor on the rubber plantations at Dizangué for the duration of the Second World War. As the story ends we learn that Eléna has taken another lover, none other than the police chief himself.

Despite the narrator's opening lines, «A person who always amused me in my youth was Monsieur Neuf,» we quickly learn that Jean Neuf is hardly amusing. Not only is his treatment of Evindi brutal and capricious, but this central incident is merely one example of a structured pattern of political repression. We are told, for example, that «Evindi certainly would not have been punished if he had had the wisdom to be born white» (*Embarras et Cie*, p. 85). And we learn of some of the matters, the «crimes,» which fill the police chief's day, as when «a white had just slapped a black, but instead of respectfully accepting the blow, the black had a discontented air which did not please the white at all» (*Embarras et Cie*, p. 78). Lastly, M. Neuf drinks heavily and has «his collection of negresses (who) gave him satisfaction,» this last fact especially important given the nature of Evindi's «crime» and punishment (*Embarras et Cie*, p. 82).

There is no doubt as to the author's view on all this. And yet it is surprisingly difficult to pin down his position owing to the constant use of irony. All we learn, for example, about Evindi's thoughts during his arrest and punishment is that he had formerly defended the French and the Greeks as being «incomparable in their goodness and in the friendship which they had for blacks».

The text continues «Today, M Neuf's riding crop, skillfully manipulated by Assisastanas, certainly changed somewhat Evindi's opinion of whites » (*Embarras et Cie*, p 91) And even though the narrator tells us of Evindi's release from forced labor, transforming him into a hero for his contribution toward « our victory over the Nazis. », we learn nothing more of him, of his experience in the labor camp, or of the state of his political consciousness (*Embarras et Cie*, p 82) In addition it is important to note that Evindi is not idealized in the story He has certain flaws in his character which make him more lifelike, but less useful for polemic purposes To cite but one example, he does only white women's hair since blacks could not afford to pay him as much as the colonialists do The treatment he receives is still shocking, but Bebey has chosen not to portray him as a completely innocent victim of white villainy

Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio is the least political of the three novels Essentially a love story, it focuses on Mbenda, a fisherman, and his love for the scandalous Agatha Moudio The European presence is little in evidence, although it should be noted that when there is intervention, it is unfailingly linked to trouble for the Africans For example, the white monkey-hunters have Mbenda thrown in jail for 15 days when he dares to ask them for salt for the villagers, in exchange for the privilege of hunting in their forest Later in the book, the police chief from Douala intervenes when the men of the village are punishing Uncle Gros-Coeur for what they believe to be his sorcery and killing of Dicky, another villager Arrested and subsequently sentenced to four years in prison, three of them will die in Mokolo because of the harsh treatment they receive there

The last colonialist intervention is of a different sort Agatha is seen being driven to town in the white monkey-hunter's car, and after her marriage to Mbenda, she will deliver a son, who even after the appropriate waiting period, will fail to take on the «local color » Mbenda is upset by this, but is won over by the wisdom of Salomon who tells him « whether it comes from heaven or hell, a child is still a child »⁴

What is of interest here is that, except for this last example, the role of the Europeans in *Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio*, and in most of Bebey's work, is so slight that the plot line would flow just as well without these episodes The fathering of Agatha Moudio's son is more complicated It is of course an example of economically and

politically based, racially related, exploitation Agatha, despite her «loose» life, is not truly promiscuous, and her sexual encounters with the monkey-hunter are undoubtedly motivated, at least in part, by her financial situation. At the same time, it would be a misreading of Bebey's text to raise this to a symbolic level. Agatha is no one's pawn and, if not always a model of her civilization, she is fully conscious of her actions and in charge of her life. The question of Agatha's son will be considered later.

La Poupée ashanti is, at least on the surface, the most conventionally political of Bebey's works. Set in Accra, Ghana, shortly before Le Docteur's (read Dr Nkrumah) accession to the presidency of the new republic, it deals with the marketwomen and their political organization, with the country's leader himself, and includes a large political march and demonstration midway through the novel. And yet the main interest does not lie in politics. Despite the political background, it is essentially the love story of Edna, a young marketwoman, and Spio, a young and somewhat idealistic bureaucrat, which moves the plot. The political issue which is intertwined with this personal relationship centers on the marketwoman who has lost her seller's permit because the man to whom her daughter is engaged has been arrested for being a member of the opposition party in Parliament. This issue and, more generally, that of Le Docteur and the principle of his one-party state, are the subject of heated discussion between Edna, her aunt, and her grandmother, Mam, the leader of the Marketwomen's Association. These political issues are of serious interest now, and at the time Le Docteur (Nkrumah) was coming to real power topical as well. But a close reading of the text produces two interesting discoveries: first, these key political issues are downplayed by stylistic means and are thus shown to be of less than central importance, second, the novel never resolves these issues, an unusual situation in the highly polemic world of African fiction.

Bebey's method is ingenious. The main discussion concerning Le Docteur and his government takes place during Sunday lunch. Tante Princess states one side of the case in this exchange with Edna.

—When all is said and done, I don't see what he's done for the country

—He liberated us, Aunt Princess

—Were we in prison before he came along??

The discussion is then interrupted when Tante Princess catches a fish bone in her throat and the political talk is delayed. It resumes a page later and Tante Princess is told of the case of Mrs Amiofi and her seller's permit. During this narration we learn that she once had a small business in the Nima quarter of the city, which then leads to another digression, this time by the narrator who gives a long description of Nima. The story of Mrs Amiofi is then continued, and we learn the rest of the situation and the crux of the problem facing the marketwomen: will they, who helped bring this government to power, now lead a demonstration against it? But again, just as we are about to learn their intentions, and before any final verdict on the government is delivered by the women at lunch, the report of Edna's fight in a nightclub the evening before comes up. This is followed by the story of Spio's growing interest in Edna and the chapter ends without further political reference.

The same ambiguity is seen in another example. Never during the course of the entire work do we see *Le Docteur* in person, nor do we hear him speak. Rather we are given a quite detailed description of a statue of him, located in front of the Parliament building, facing the sea. The statue is described without comment and then the narration returns to the marketwomen's march on Parliament.

The statue had been placed in the courtyard of the Parliament Building facing the sea. Executed with good taste and simplicity, it represented the Doctor in about one and a half times life size. Placed on a marble plinth, the statue itself was in bronze and depicted the great man standing, dressed in a simply cut traditional Ghanaian costume, and walking, one hand raised to heaven, while in the other hand the «Conditor» was holding a walking stick. This stick had already become legendary and was regarded so much as one of the attributes of the Doctor that the Duke of Edinburgh himself had noted that the Ghanaian Prime Minister was never seen without it.

The man's pose was that of a shepherd leading his flock, or even more that of Moses in the desert, walking ahead of the people of Israel. A noble, confident attitude, that of a man convinced that nothing could stop him reaching the goal he had set for himself, his country, and the rest of Africa.

On the plinth, in metal letters, were written the following sentences, which served to stimulate activity in a whole country that at one point was regarded as the champion of African independence «For me,» was written on one side of the plinth, «the independence of Ghana has no value by itself if it is not accompanied by the liberation of the rest of Africa » On another side, one could read «Seek ye first your political freedom and all the rest will be added unto you » This parody of the Bible puzzled many clergymen who could not understand that political freedom might also be regarded as something sacred And finally, on a third side of the plinth «We prefer poverty as free men to peace and plenty as slaves »

Opposite the Parliament Building, on the other side of High Street, was an enormous car park Beyond, there was only the vast sea, gray or blue according to the weather, with its heaving waves and its ships about to sail for Europe (*The Ashanti Doll*, pp 75-76)

The passage from *La Poupée ashanti* is remarkably neutral in tone The conjunction of the observation of the statue's good taste and simplicity with the fact that it is bigger than life-size might be ironic, but that does not seem certain Likewise, the expression «sa deuxième main» («his second hand») strikes some French readers as odd and possibly humorous, but this reaction is by no means universal The best evidence of Bebey's intention is, in fact, not internal to this novel but is found rather in an unpublished journalistic piece entitled «Accra,» written by Bebey during his stay there in the fall of 1959 His original intention was to publish this reportage, but he found it too critical As he said to me, «I told myself that it wasn't up to an African to publish such a piece »⁷ What is of central importance here is a passage from this 95-page report, equal in length and largely identical to the passage just cited from *La Poupée ashanti* A comparison of these two passages, a study of the key differences, serves to throw light upon Bebey's intentions in the novel One important difference is found towards the beginning of the «Accra» passage

It was the first time I ever saw the statue of a statesman still alive and living in his own country I don't know why this thought came to me the first day that I saw this monument I

should certainly have limited myself to noting that this statue had been executed with good taste and simplicity

The important fact is that Bebey did limit himself in the novel to observing the taste and simplicity of the statue, leaving out the first five lines of this commentary. The difference is significant and it is not clear whether the reason for the modification is of a political nature. The remark would be inappropriate within its context in the novel, and so it may well have been a primarily stylistic decision. There is, however, another section of the «Accra» text which differs significantly from the parallel passage in *La Poupée ashanti* for which the stylistic justification might be less plausible

The man's pose was that of a shepherd leading his flock, or even more that of Moses in the desert, walking ahead of the people of Israel. A noble, confident attitude, that of a man convinced that nothing could stop him reaching the goal he had set for himself, his country, and the rest of Africa (*The Ashanti Doll*, p. 76)

The man's pose is that of a shepherd leading his flock, or that of Moses in the desert, walking ahead of the children of Israel. A noble, confident attitude, that of the man who knows that nothing will stop him reaching the goal, for a supernatural, invisible force guides him, a force which must triumph over all obstacles. But what then is this force?¹⁰

The paragraph from «Accra», on the right, ends with this question «Mais quelle est donc cette force?» The lack of any explanation of this supernatural, invisible guiding force, and the abrupt transition to the next part of the description may well be ironic and intended to cast doubts about Nkrumah. While this question would not fit well stylistically into the text of the novel, a pattern does begin to emerge which makes it unlikely that stylistic concern was the only reason for these modifications.

During an interview in November 1974, I told Bebey of my confusion regarding his political position in this novel, saying that I just couldn't be certain of his attitude towards Le Docteur. He answered my question and then went on to indicate some of the political problems facing the contemporary African writer.

I am delighted that you couldn't determine that I haven't decided either. But no one in Africa today really knows. I think that the thing which bothers you, and bothers me too, comes from the real ambiguity which one finds in Africa today. We are in a pretty difficult political situation. We've had the independence of African countries for at least ten years and we had great hope at the start. And then, little by little, we have become more aware that perhaps we have not chosen the best path. But today, in Africa, who is going to open his mouth and say just what he thinks? Who is going to say «You know, your political party, your one-party state, your government, no, that's not what we want. We don't want all these problems, we want a government which will really help us to develop the country or Africa.» But who is going to say that? This is also one of the reasons I prefer, as a Cameroonian, to situate the action of *La Poupée ashanti* in Ghana. At least I'm in a foreign country and no one will come bother me. If I placed the same action in Cameroon I am not sure that people would say that it's a novel. They might say there is something there which concerns us.»¹¹

This ambiguity in the text is then clearly intentional and motivated by very real personal considerations. It should be stressed that Bebey's decision to situate this novel in Ghana was not primarily to deter any possible personal repercussions, but because, as the «Accra» manuscript shows, the problem he is discussing and the story he tells are rooted in that country. *La Poupée ashanti* is not then an essentially Cameroonian story transposed out of that country for political reasons. At the same time, we need to remember Bebey's political situation is special because of the role played by his brother in Cameroon before independence and his fate under the French-supported Ahidjo regime. Marcel Bebey Eyidi had led the fight for veterans' benefits for the «volunteers» who had joined the French forces during the Second World War. He subsequently went to Paris to complete his medical studies, becoming the first African M.D. in Central Africa. In the early 1950's he had been an attaché in Dr. Aujoulat's office, at the Colonial Ministry in Paris, but left this post to return to Cameroon, in 1956, to open a clinic. In the first Cameroonian elections after independence (April 10, 1960) he beat a member of Ahidjo's government, Chief Bétoté Akwa, carrying even the latter's home district. *Le Monde* felt that if Ahidjo

were elected President and needed to bring a member of the opposition into his government, Dr. Bebey Eyidi would likely become the Prime Minister.¹² Instead, when he and three other opposition leaders publicly protested Ahidjo's moves to establish a one-party system in Cameroon, they were arrested on charges of conspiracy and sedition, tried and subsequently sentenced to thirty months in prison and a fine of 250,000 CFA.¹³ His health broken by the length and conditions of his imprisonment, Bebey Eyidi died a year after his release, at the age of 52. Needless to say, there was no possibility of Francis Bebey returning to Cameroon during this time. He is not, however, now in exile like his compatriot Mongo Béti and many other African writers. Although Paris has been his base of operation for many years now, he travels regularly to Cameroon and has remained a Cameroonian citizen.

To return to our discussion of *La Poupée ashanti*, following the description of Le Docteur's statue, the demonstration reaches its climax and Edna is wounded by a bullet as the forces of law-and-order try, in a frantic and disorganized manner, to prevent the crowd from entering the Parliament building. The novel contains little else of a political nature, except for the satirical account of the Commission convened to study the Amiofi affair. Spio, who has been demoted to a bush post for his attempt to help the market-women, is recalled to the capital and he and Edna will marry once it has been decided that she will continue to work in the market with Mam.

The last of the three novels, *Le Roi Albert d'Effidi*, is the most interesting in terms of its handling of political themes. As in *La Poupée ashanti*, it appears to be a novel deeply concerned with political matters, focusing as it does on the coming of the first elections in Cameroon, the first step on the path to nationhood. As we will see, however, political issues are so deeply enmeshed with others, some of a personal nature and others affecting village life, that it becomes impossible to isolate the political elements and find any kind of clearly polemic thrust.

The first thing that strikes the reader in search of politically related elements is that virtually no mention is made of anything political until the elections are discussed for the first time, some two-thirds of the way through the book. And what is more, when this element finally does appear, the opposing candidates for this first political office are the same people opposed for other, more personal reasons in the preceding pages of the novel. It is important

to underline this last fact since it detracts from the genuinely political nature of these elections and leads the reader, once again, to recognize Bebey's systematic devaluation of political concerns in his writing

Le Roi Albert d'Effidi is essentially a novel of conflict—conflict between Albert and the young, impetuous Bikounou for the hand of Nani, conflict between the different villages in the area, conflict between the generations in Effidi, ideological conflict of a sort—Nani's father, Toutouma, sees Albert as a «capitalist»—and finally, with the elections, open political conflict—the three main contenders will be Bikounou, Toutouma and Albert

In *Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio* the fisherman Mbenda says at one point «I understood I was at the parting of the ways, the old and the new »¹⁴ But this is much truer of *Le Roi Albert d'Effidi*. Village life is already a hybrid of traditional and European ways. Albert has a shop in town and goes there each day on his bicycle, Bikounou works for the colonial administration, Toutouma is a worker who belongs to a union started by a French technical advisor, and he sees the world in terms of class struggle, the younger generation is often irreverent towards its elders, and, lastly, with the coming of the elections, only one representative will be chosen to speak for all the villagers in the area, thus breaking down their traditional autonomy and mutual distrust. The chief of Effidi, Ndengué, upon hearing of the elections, realizes their full import. He says, in a key passage « I have a foreboding of an even greater change than that known by our fathers when the whites came »¹⁵ Profound changes are taking place and, while their ultimate dimensions are not explored, the chief and others are most uneasy about the future.

A brief look at the book will show some of the complexity which both makes for its richness and clearly removes it from the world of politically committed African literature. The first part of the book centers upon Albert's and Bikounou's competition for Nani. This personal conflict becomes somewhat more generalized since Albert is a member of the generation in power while Bikounou is younger, more modern and, in a Western sense, in love with Nani. Toutouma, Nani's father, dislikes both suitors, Albert for his supposed wealth, and Bikounou for his lack of respect for the traditional ways. Bikounou, realizing that Albert will be chosen to marry Nani, deflowers her one afternoon in a manioc field—with her complete consent, by the way—hoping to be forced

to marry her, as tradition dictates. Despite this tactic Albert marries Nani at the end of the first section.

The second part centers on the elections, and the conflicts already evident in the first part are renewed. The generation conflict, for example, is intensified and rendered more «official» with Bikounou running for office against Albert, Toutouma, and others. The ideological terms «capitalist» and «communist» (as Toutouma is considered by some) are bandied about, and we see scenes of the electoral campaign. But—and this is crucial—the whole political aspect of this section, providing as it does an excellent opportunity to debate opposing ideologies, opposing visions of the new Africa, is undermined. As in *La Poupée ashanti*, the tendency to favor clearly one political view over another is absent. Each of the three main candidates is, as in life, a complex mixture of philosophical, political and personal inconsistencies. Albert is rich by village standards and decides to show this by purchasing an automobile to use during the campaign. Generally wise, his motives and behavior may not have always been pure in taking Nani from Bikounou. His father-in-law, Toutouma, is politically opposed to Albert's «capitalism» and shows himself to be progressive in his attitudes towards women—his wife and daughters eat at the table with him, for example—but he is traditional in many respects, too, including the marriage of his daughter. His union activities and the philosophy behind them are a curious blend of something very foreign with a traditional African emphasis on community and the common good. Bikounou, bitterly disappointed at losing Nani, runs a vindictive campaign, calling Albert a capitalist because of his new car, even though he himself has the area's only other motorized vehicle, a Vespa, and of course works for the colonial administration. Rather than being an authentic spokesman for the younger generation, he behaves in an outrageous and irresponsible manner towards everyone. For example, the «debate» between Bikounou and Albert in the village of Zaabat ends in a fight between their respective supporters, fueled in part by Bikounou's highly non-political announcement that he has continued up to that very day to have sexual relations with Nani. As the elections grew close, the young men of Effidi, in a surprising move, decide to punish Bikounou and his companion Féfé for their unbearable behavior and beat them badly.

The elections themselves are never seen. In another intentional downplaying of the political function, Chapter 12 ends with

Bikounou's punishment and Chapter 14 opens with the drums of Nkool, Toutouma's village, announcing the victory of its son. The intervening chapter, one page in length, is a little essay on laughter. While this is unrelated in any direct way to the plot line, it certainly bears an organic relationship to the text on a thematic plane, and provides another example of the use of humor as a counter-balance to political concerns.

In the remainder of the book we learn that Bikounou has been in the hospital recovering from his beating, and that Albert, arrested along with the young men, although he had no part in his opponent's beating, is just getting out of prison. The elections have come and gone, but the final resolution of the novel remains. Albert has decided, during his month in prison, to return Nani to her parents, thus leaving her free to marry the man she really loves. He says «The times have changed. We must no longer force our daughters to marry men we have chosen for them» (*Le Roi Albert d'Effidi*, p. 180). That evening Nani returns to Effidi and, in a moving scene, announces her intention to remain forever with Albert.

I would like to close by pointing out common elements in Bebey's writings which best serve to describe his handling of and attitude towards political concerns. Though general, they form a clear contrast with the way in which such concerns have traditionally been treated by African writers.

Politics is not the central concern of Bebey's novels, nor of the vast majority of his individual characters. This does not mean, however, that it is not important. As Bebey writes in *La Poupée ashanti*, «political freedom might also be regarded as something sacred» (*The Ashanti Doll*, p. 76). Politics is most often subordinated to other aspects of daily life and when that is not the case, it is inextricably bound to these. Ideology is never dominant. Politics is more often than not a background element and as such is not central to the unfolding of the plot. For example, it is the fact of the elections, their very existence which is the important thing while Toutouma's victory is almost incidental.

Not only are there no real ideological discussions, but there are almost no examples of any kind of inflated or abstract language. In the few instances where this does occur, the Commission's meeting to close the Amiofi affair, Spio's speech to Edna in which he characterizes her as «the woman of the new Africa,» or *Le Roi Albert d'Effidi's* little chapter on laughter, it is immediately under-

cut by various comic devices.¹⁶ Neither words nor ideas are more important than individual men and women. Related to this is the question of symbols. It would be tempting to see Agatha Moudio's son, for example, as the symbol of the new generation of Africans, born of the merging of African and European elements, of traditional ways and the modern world. But nothing permits such interpretation. In Bebey's works, individuals do not represent anything beyond themselves.

Bebey's distrust of high-flown rhetoric and of ideology is accompanied by a belief in people and in the necessity and efficacy of hard work. Edna is illiterate and yet she is both an economically productive and politically active member of society. The same message is seen in *Trois petits cireurs*, a children's story not treated here. The shoeshine boys are young, poor, and uneducated, and yet they work each day to earn their livelihood. Though their task is hardly glamorous, they do it conscientiously, and that seems to be the key to real economic and political development for Bebey: words, ideologies and leaders are all powerless to solve problems and build nations—only people can.

The question of race and racism, linked inevitably to the European occupation of Africa, is one of the most important in Bebey's work. The European's systematic mistreatment of Africans is acknowledged and portrayed, but not insisted upon. The whites are seldom in view, although their presence and power behind the scenes is made clear from time to time. When they do intervene in the lives of Africans, the effect is often damaging. Yet, even when the nature of the intervention is as troubling as in the fathering of Agatha Moudio's son, Bebey treats the matter in a humorous vein, according reconciliation, here as elsewhere, a major place in his work. It is not a question of cowardice, nor of simply accepting whatever mistreatment the colonial powers chose to inflict, but rather of transcending their evil, at least to the extent that it not continuously poison one's life. John Updike, in an article in *The New Yorker* on Bebey's first novel, writes that *Agatha Moudio's Son* « gracefully propounds an all but forgotten equation—that between the spirit of comedy and the spirit of forgiveness ».¹⁷ The comic element, as we have seen, is indeed an important one in Bebey's work and one often used in close conjunction with political themes.

Bebey discussed the question of race and racism at length dur-

ing a series of interviews in June 1978, and dealt with somewhat different aspects of this question than those treated in his fiction. He is opposed to even the gentlest negritude because of its implicit racism. Speaking of his friend Bernard Dadié, he discussed this point:

He wrote this poem which was very famous at one point

«Je vous remercie mon Dieu, de m'avoir créé Noir » (I thank you my God, for having made me Black) for having done this, for having done that. I said No. I thank you my God, for having made me human. I want blacks to be men first »¹⁸

However innocent Dadié's sentiments may be, even this kind of racial distinction, born though it was in reaction to European racism, displeases Bebey. For, as he said, « *at base, what is racism? It's just human stupidity and this idiocy doesn't have the right to exist »¹⁹. After making the point that he, too, had experienced European racism and had found it difficult to transcend this terrible evil, he went on to tell of his reaction to these experiences:

I think that as a person oppressed in times past and even present, and I don't know, maybe future, I have the duty, once I have seen clearly, to point out the path to my oppressor. It's as pretentious as anything, but I live for that. It's the whole point of everything I do.²⁰

We have mentioned white mistreatment of blacks, but we also have the example of Africans being mistreated, and even shot, by their own government in *La Poupée ashanti*, the only one of those works set in an independent country. But whereas numbers of other African novels have treated this kind of situation in terms of neo-colonialism, the plight of Mrs. Amiofi, Spio's demotion, and even Edna's bullet wound, are better seen as examples of bureaucratic incompetence and corruption, and of police confusion. The incidents described here could happen anywhere and, while regrettable in themselves, hardly constitute an indictment of Le Docteur or of his government's underlying political philosophy.

Bebey's universe is not a tragic one. Many politically centered African novels end in the physical or moral destruction of the pro-

tagonist One thinks of Toundi's pathetic end in Oyono's *Une Vie de boy*, of Okonkwo's self-destruction in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and, in Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances*, of the protagonist's desperate attempt to cross the border to his homeland and of his almost ritual death, being killed by the sacred crocodile as he leaps into the river Bebey's writings contain episodes of brutality, racism, suffering and death, but these are not the general rule and the resolution of each novel is essentially happy, if not idyllic The European political adventure in Africa seriously affected every aspect of African life, but in Bebey's works these changes destroyed neither Africa nor the Africans

While beyond the scope of this paper, there are two other considerations which cannot go unmentioned since they might both be considered legitimately political within the African context The first of these, the question of the place of publication, and with that the whole question of intended audience, has been discussed at length by many African writers and critics of this literature ²¹ The second, a closely related issue, is that of the language chosen by the author for the creation of his or her work Bebey has chosen to publish almost all of his fiction at Editions CLE, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, and has in this way both made clear his intended audience and given good support to the cause of indigenous publishing He has, at the same time, made a very conscious choice to write in French and feels himself in no way compromised in so doing ²² Bebey's situation in this respect is somewhat different from that of many African authors in that he comes from a very small ethno-linguistic group (the Douala) and thus has a small natural audience If he wrote in Hausa, Yoruba, or Swahili he would not be in quite the same situation But even so the issue is clearly a philosophical one for him, too While his primary audience is clearly African it is inconceivable, given his views on racism and his world view, that his message of the dignity of all men, a message more philosophical than political, should reach only that group

NOTES

1 Abiola Irele, «A New Mood in the African Novel,» *West Africa* 2729 (September 20, 1969), p 1113

2 Irving Howe *Politics and the Novel* (New York Fawcett World Press, 1967), p 19

3 «Camara Laye commitment to timeless values » (Interview by J Stephen Rubin) *Africa Report* 17 5, p 22

4 For a fuller discussion of this literature, see W Curtis Schade, «A New Popular Fiction in French Language African Literature the case of les Editions CLE,» in *When the Drumbeat Changes Selected Papers from the 1978 Meeting of the African Literature Association* Washington, D C Three Continent Press, 1981)

5 *Embarras et Cie* (Yaoundé Editions CLE, 1968), p 75 This and all subsequent quotations from this work, *Le Roi Albert d'Effidi* the «Accra» manuscript, my interviews with Bebey, and the excerpts from Dadié's poem will be my own translation unless otherwise noted

6 *Agatha Moudio's Son* trans Joyce A Hutchinson (Nairobi Heinemann Educational Books, 1971), p 153

7 *The Ashanti Doll* trans Joyce A Hutchinson (Westport, CT Lawrence Hill & Co , 1977), p 51

8 Unpublished interview June 1978 Paris

9 «Accra» manuscript p 10

10 «Accra» manuscript, p 10

11 Unpublished interview November 1974, Bloomington IN

12 *Le Monde* April 13, 1960, p 4

13 *Le Monde* July 5, 1962 p 1 and July 13, 1962, p 16

14 *Agatha Moudio's Son* p 43

15 *Le Roi Albert d'Effidi* (Yaoundé Editions CLE, 1976) p 127

16 *The Ashanti Doll* p 175 *Le Roi Albert d'Effidi* pp 172 173 .

17 John Updike, «Shades of Black,» *The New Yorker* 49, 48 (January 21, 1974) p 91

18 Unpublished interview, June 1978, Paris Dadié's poem is found in his *Légendes et poèmes* (Paris Seghers, 1966) pp 239 240

19 Unpublished interview, June 1978 Paris

20 Unpublished interview, June 1978, Paris

21 The Senegalese writer Pathé Gagne has said that «the choice of a place of publication is already the choice of audience,» and this sums up much that has been said on this matter (Quoted in Phaniel A Egejura, «The Influence of Audience on West African Novels,» Diss UCLA 1974 p 29)

22 But Bebey, at the same time, insists that a profound knowledge of their mother tongue and culture is a prerequisite for Africans who do write in European languages For a fuller discussion of this point, see Norman Stokle, «Eretretien avec Francis Bebey,» *Présence Francophone* 16 (Spring, 1978), pp 188 189

SEMBENE OUSMANE'S *XALA* THE USE OF FILM AND NOVEL AS REVOLUTIONARY WEAPON

KENNETH HARROW
Michigan State University

Sembène Ousmane's works, originally inspired by the struggle against colonial domination, now reflect the revolutionary intellectual's protest against corrupt statism. *Xala*¹ was conceived as such a revolutionary tool, and as such stands both against the corruption of the contemporary, neo-colonialist establishment and for the basic values of the revolution of the common people. But this idea of a «true» revolution advocated by Sembène is not a simple transplantation of European ideology—it is marked by the particular nature and demands of Senegal's situation. Classical Marxist thought combines with African social and religious configurations; together they must be seen as a package, as encompassing a total political *Weltanschauung* in which revolution today presses its demands as insistently as did the movement for independence in the past.

Written in 1974, and made into a film the same year, Sembène Ousmane's *Xala* offers us a unique opportunity to compare the effectiveness of African film and novel as vehicles for social and political protest. The structure of the plot is a simple one. El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, the protagonist, decides to celebrate his financial success since Independence by taking a third wife, N'Gone, despite the feelings of his first two wives. On his wedding night he finds himself struck by *xala*, an impotency resulting from a curse. He attempts to find the cause, which he suspects lies with one of his other wives, and seeks a cure with marabouts, Muslim spiritual authorities credited with strong magical powers. In the end we learn that El Hadji was a thief, as well as a corrupt businessman, and that it was not one of his wives but a man he had robbed who ex-

acted the revenge

The title «El Hadji» is a Muslim honorific denoting venerableness and religious devotion in *Xala*, El Hadji is a symbol for an exploitative capitalism merged with an equally corrupt government, for a religious hypocrisy linked to the oppression of women and the abuse of traditional authority. He thus affords Sembène the opportunity to attack a host of ills in one character.

Historical Muslim resistance to European colonialism developed from the early days of French penetration into the interior of Senegal. There were extensive campaigns led by Lat Dior and Samori Touré in the 19th century, and mass movements like those of the Mourids and the Hamalists which extended to the present day. To many, Independence marked the culmination of a long struggle. In both novel and film, *Xala* begins with images of El Hadji accompanying other black business leaders as they take over the Chamber of Commerce formerly occupied by the French. The formal espousal of official «revolution», now dubbed «African socialism» by Senegal's head of state, is portrayed in this scene in which the prominent African Muslim joins with other blacks in replacing their earlier European masters.

Of the same generation as her husband, Adja Awa Astou, El Hadji's first wife, converted from Christianity (her name had been Renée) to Islam, signaling, in the novel, that same revolt against the past. Now, as a Muslim, she represents the highest religious ideals set forth by her and El Hadji's new faith. She had accompanied her husband to Mecca on the traditional pilgrimage, thus winning for herself the honorific «Adja», the female equivalent of «El Hadji». She is totally obedient and submissive to her husband: she accepts polygamy without dissent, and even bows to El Hadji's discrimination against her conjugal and sexual rights in favor of his other wives—again without a word of protest. She demands only that her religious, moral and social respect be maintained. When El Hadji urges her to enter her co-wife's house on the way to his third's wedding, she refuses to leave the car. Her dignity as «Awa», first wife, demands that she be the honored one to whom the others must defer, not vice versa. When her husband becomes impotent, she protects his dignity by refusing to allow the subject to be discussed, particularly by her modern, revolutionary daughter, Rama. In all this she is an exemplary Muslim wife. But for the Marxist, this represents delusion, not heroism. «The door closed, leaving Adja Awa Astou alone again. As others isolate themselves with drugs she

obtained her daily dose from her religion» (p. 25)

At its worst the Muslim faith serves, in the Marxist views of the novel, as an instrument used by the men to oppress the women. El Hadji, who is not particularly devout, uses this, his «patrimoine religieux,» as he calls it in the film, as an excuse for taking a young, beautiful creature as his third wife. When his daughter objects, he slaps her forcefully and evokes religious tradition, exploited here most blatantly for egotistical purposes.

The special stamp of El Hadji's Islamic convictions is marked by the incorporation of traditional religious beliefs: fetishes, protective amulets, potions, spells and curses all appear prominently in *Xala*. Indeed, the title, *Xala*, reinforces this fact: *xala*, meaning impotency, is a Wolof, not an Arabic, Muslim term. However, even when extensively assimilated with Islam in the practices of the marabouts, these traditional beliefs do not lose their antipodal opposition to Westernized cultural and religious practices, and therefore do not come to be associated with colonialist or neo-colonialist models. They are not overtly acknowledged by the dominant governing elite, whose affected acculturation is heavily satirized, particularly in the film. Rather, they remain the province of the villagers and the urban poor, the last, sad weapons of beggars and the poverty stricken who lack the arsenal of Western values. The marabouts and beggars who cause and cure the *xala* are all indigent or non-Westernized. For Sembène they represent the masses—not defined abstractly as an economic class like the urban proletariat—but simply the masses of African people who have refused or not had the chance to accept modern European ways and have generally suffered from the Western presence.

In contrast to them, the wealthy bourgeois Africans, many engaged in trade and finance and enjoying the government's favors, have risen to occupy the places of the former white colonialists. If the country is still indebted to France economically, and is indebted to and controlled by the metropolitan country as much as ever, still a new bureaucracy and infrastructure of African origins has sprung up, often the most visible sign of the corruption which casts its shadow over the masses in their slums and villages. The Mercedes now have chauffeurs for black «*hommes affaires*,» businessmen are portrayed as cynical and corrupt middlemen acting as stooges for the silent and invisible forces of an ever-dominant European capital.

As with most African questions, the reality of everyday life

does not leave one with pure choices, but rather midway between the two poles of the modern European and the traditional African worlds. A character caught strikingly thus is Rama, El Hadji's eldest daughter. El Hadji wishes that this daughter had been a son (as did Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*), since she is both more courageous and less mercenary than his other children. In the novel she drives a Fiat, and by dress and ideological choice asserts her identity as a modern African against both European «Tomism» and African, Islamic traditionalism. It is she alone who tells her father of her opposition to his third marriage and refuses to accept polygamy for herself when the time comes. In the film version her revolutionary role is made more visible and is accentuated. Instead of a Fiat, she is on a mofette, out for all the city to see. Her hair is plaited in the traditional African fashion, not straightened in the modern European style. And her University work involves translations into Wolof, not French, which she refuses to speak in the film.

Yet she enjoys the fruits of her father's corruptly earned wealth, and all her actions take on somewhat the air of a bad conscience. This point is brought out at the end of the novel in which the differences between her and the lumpenproletariat are stressed. When the host of beggars and cripples comes to Adja Awa Astou's house and attacks El Hadji, Rama is filled with indignation and anger. Her loyalties divided, her bad conscience—or is it bad faith?—leaves her «bursting with anger. Against whom? Against her father? Against those wretched people? She who was always ready with the words 'revolution' and 'new social order' felt deep within her breast something like a stone falling heavily into her heart, crushing her» (p. 112). Rama's position must have been the most compelling of all, for the successful revolutionary author himself whose own dilemmas are most accurately reflected in her anguish.

Except for Rama, the women are generally portrayed as victims. The first and only faithful wife, Adja Awa Astou, suffers deeply but patiently because of her husband's polygamous choices—enduring the decline in his favors and, in the end, of his fortunes as well. Her nobility is admirably figured in her majestic bearing and, in the film, in the telling roar of the sea and the wind which accompany her as she leaves the wedding celebrations of the third wife. She dresses in traditional fashion and belongs to a generation older than that of the other two wives—but still her villa

and wealth, all bestowed by El Hadji, place her in the ranks of the new African bourgeoisie, living in the suburban, luxurious quarters of Dakar with their well-trimmed yards and well-patrolled streets. The pathos of her victimization, like the purity of her religious beliefs, is thus qualified by her material conditions.

The second wife, Oumi N'Doye, wears an elaborate wig and dresses in modern European clothes in a sexually appealing style. In the film especially she is played as a domineering, almost castrating female. In the novel her function as servant to El Hadji's sexual and worldly tastes is accentuated. Above all, her mercenary qualities, seen in conjunction with her style and place in the marriage, clearly accord with the classical Marxist doctrine which holds that in the bourgeois marriage the woman is exploited and her role is reduced to little more than that of a prostitute. In the novel this aspect of Oumi's nature is emphasized when El Hadji's fortunes collapse and she deserts him to become, probably once again, a high fashion woman of easy virtue.

The third wife, N'Gone, is purely a sexual object. She is seen, not heard. In the novel her more vulgar features are emphasized, as is her inconsequential and shallow personality. She is depicted as being the adjunct or counterpart of her «mother,» actually her aunt, the Badyen, who arranges the marriage and clearly manipulates El Hadji with the beautiful young girl as bait. The helplessness of N'Gone is reflected in the impotency of her aunt, whose two former husbands have both died and who cannot now find herself a third due to the superstitious belief that husbands die in threes. However, the Badyen is not left bereft of powers. It is she who knows how to challenge the foolish male ego of El Hadji and to seduce him with her niece. She is characterized in the novel as manipulative and greedy, but with the particular insensitivity of the victim, who grasps with the anxiety of the threatened, aware of having no other recourse to power.

She is thus a counterpart to El Hadji himself and to all the corrupt businessmen who resemble her in their own practices, mirror her situation in their own life style, and yet, ironically, have exploited her counterparts in all of their own women. Love and hatred, as with the African-European relationship, are also reflected in the male-female relationships because they are based upon power, upon an authority which devolves not from natural gifts or venerable customs but from force wielded always for selfish interest.

Along with the position of women, it is the question of language which bears particularly upon the African context of revolutionary ideology in *Xala*. The issue of language lies at the core of acculturation—the process of replacing the African cultural identity with the European. The image of European modernity has held out an attraction that all the rhetoric of Negritude and struggling for liberation have not been able to diminish. For the poor and illiterate, the modern American gangster movies, Kung Fu and «Spaghetti» Westerns continue to serve «la mission civilisatrice», along with the French *cooperants* who still teach African schoolchildren throughout their former colonies, still using the French language and focusing upon traditional French subjects such as French, not African, geography, history, and literature. The unforgettable, anguished cries of the North African writers, Jean Amrouche and Mouloud Feraoun still testify eloquently to the continuing crisis of identity introduced by the process of acculturation. «I feel that I'm condemned to being different, to an irreducible and disturbing singularity. I am Algerian, and I think that I am completely French.»² «Good Lord, what am I. Let someone tell me what I am! Ah yes! That isn't enough.»³

In Algeria the government has attempted to solve this problem by the policy of Arabization, in which the education in the early school years is carried out exclusively in Arabic. Nonetheless, the universities still rely upon French language instruction to a large extent, and the replacement of French by Arabic in Maghrebian culture has not yet occurred for the vast majority of Maghrebian authors.

For Sembène Ousmane, too, the question of language is of major importance. A recurring theme in *Xala* is the opposition between Wolof and French: the young, revolutionary Rama insists upon conversing in Wolof, El Hadji in French. In the novel, Rama and her fiancée, Pathé, have a pact to speak in Wolof, and they fine each other when one of them slips and lapses into French. References are made, in the film, to *Kaddu*, a Wolof language newspaper which associates itself with the plight of the poor African. Language is the weapon of struggle par excellence, and it both answers and raises complex questions, which elude simplistic solutions.

For example, the Awa, Adja Awa Astou—the former Renée—now speaks only in Wolof, and it is in her family that the struggle against Muslim polygamy and neo-colonial French

cultural models takes place. In contrast, the household of Oumî N'Doye, the second wife, has capitulated completely to modern bourgeois fashion. «Oumî N'Doye had prepared her *aye* in a spirit of rivalry. A reunion meal. The menu culled from a French fashion magazine. The table was laid in a French way. There were various hors d'oeuvres and veal cutlets. The Côtes de Provence rosé kept the bottle of French mineral water company in the ice-bucket.» (p. 55). Of course, this carries through with all the characters: the greedier children of Oumî are raised in the French manner, the businessmen conduct their Chamber of Commerce meetings in emulation of their former colonial rulers, El Hadjî and the other bourgeois constantly affect French mannerisms, even when they eject El Hadjî from their number. Here the president proclaims, in the best of Gallic tones, the preeminence of that tradition at the final Chamber meeting in the film: «Mêmes les injures dans la tradition la plus pure de la francophonie» (Even insults are to be in the purest francophonic tradition).

The spoken word corresponds to the class divisions which are strikingly visible to the eye—clothing, food, manners, even religion—and it is here, in their presentation, that we see the core of the problem posed by *Xala*. Sembène Ousmane has written this polemical novel in the very language his heroes oppose, the language of the oppressors—language used here as a purely and totally European cultural expression. As a successful novelist, he has learned to make skillful use of the oppressors' tools, but not in a revolutionary sense. The banal composition and trite polemics—often couched in purely sociological jargon (e.g., «It is worth knowing something about the life led by urban polygamists. It could be called geographical polygamy, as opposed to rural polygamy etc.» (p. 66)), betray a tradition of naturalism that dates from Zola and that has scarcely improved on the original. The dilemmas faced by Sembène in choice of style and language are known to most successful African writers who insist upon representing the interests of a class from which their success has removed them. Ngugi's solution, which was to bring his most recent play, written in Kikuyu, to the villages, gave a greater immediacy to his political message, and earned him more than a year in prison. Kateb Yacine turned to the same solution in creating a «popular» Arab language troupe of players in France. In the novel version of *Xala* the contradictions for Sembène are heightened by the fact that he must use French to identify those moments when his characters

are supposed to be speaking in Wolof

But what he dares not do in the novel—that is, write in Wolof—he triumphantly affirms in the film. Sembène thus solves the one great dilemma of the committed African writer by turning to a medium in which he communicates with the uneducated classes without betraying his ideals. The emphasis on language, which he can now give with clear conscience in the film, is made visibly apparent to a much greater degree than in the novel. When Rama visits her father in his office, she insists upon speaking Wolof while he responds in French. The novel doesn't contain these lines—nor El Hadji's fury when he finally explodes at his daughter. In the film, El Hadji is forced to defend himself against his former business colleagues, at the height of the polemic he assumes his daughter's position, using the same expletive with which she had belabored him, «salauds,» and requests permission to address them in Wolof. The tables are turned on El Hadji, and his former colleagues are aware of the implicit ideology behind his request: they angrily refuse him. The novel does not contain any of this dialogue. In the film the stately bearing of Adja Awa Astu is complemented by her speech in Wolof, Oumi N'Doye's pretentiousness is underscored by her obviously studied use of French. The novel cannot convey any of this. The importance of the newspaper, *Kaddu*, as a revolutionary instrument is stressed in the film, omitted in the novel. Subtitles cannot be used in novels.

Without having to sacrifice his former audience—we in the West are obviously still available as readers as well as viewers—Sembène has succeeded in broadening his appeal, and more importantly, extending his message to his Senegalese compatriots in a way that doesn't betray what he is advocating. Here we must seek consistency and not judge the film on critical aesthetic grounds which ignore its ideological purposes. The film is more effective than the novel not because of a more sophisticated use of the medium, but because of a more appropriately conceived rapport between visual image and theme, and a more effective oral dimension. The wedding ceremony, for example, is filled with numerous small touches used exclusively in the film, such as the fat man picking his nose, the gay waiter saying «shee-it,» the «oreos» joking about getting away from blacks in Spain and from «Negritude» in Europe—in short, the whole African bourgeois nouveau riche in all its pretentious crudeness, blindness, vulgarity, and condescension. A little touch—the coins El Hadji throws to the

beggars are retrieved by them only at the pleasure of a soldier who filches one for himself. Crude power is displayed in crude style—without extravagant color or plush sets, lacking in sophisticated camera techniques—and yet it is as memorable as the paraplegics whose forlorn presence is felt lingering on the street corner. When El Hadji, piqued by their implacable gaze, has them cast out of his sight, the cripples and beggars doggedly return to haunt their wealthy counterparts, the new elite who have risen from their ranks by thieving, and how are afraid of seeing their own image figured in the others' anguish.

The film and novel both portray the rich as usurpers and opportunists whose pretensions to European culture disguise their recent ascension from the street. They hate the street and its poverty for reminding them of that fact—a point reinforced particularly in the film. In the novel El Hadji complains about the beggars to the president: «These beggars should be locked up for good» (p. 33). However, in the film he has the president call the police to have the street cleared of the *déchets humains*, claiming that they would hurt tourism, that independence should have brought an end to the sight of beggars and cripples. The film version gives greater emphasis to their presence. We are always aware of the poor people in the streets, from the opening shot, to the wedding reception, to El Hadji's return to his shop. They gather in crowds when there's an accident (and even to see the film being made!). We see them shipped to the barren plains outside of town, returning painfully to the streets by crawling and dragging themselves back in the heat of the day. It is their presence, so much less visible in the novel, which goes far in defining the character of the film's setting and its atmosphere.

This dimension is carried further in the crowd scene involving the accident in which we see a man from the country being robbed. He had taken the savings of his drought-stricken village to town to buy grain and seeds for the new planting season, and now lost everything. We see the thief take the money, buy some fancy clothes, and eventually replace El Hadji on the council of the Chamber of Commerce. The Marxist point, that private property is theft and that the ruling class is composed of thieves, is reinforced. At the end we learn that El Hadji had also stolen the property of his clan, and we realize that the thief is merely reenacting El Hadji's crime and that the cycle has come full circle: thieves will continue to be wheeled in and out of place as each dog turns on the other, mak-

ing pacts with the others when necessary, but never forming a truly living community. The poor, in contrast, must band together in order merely to survive. Their misery finds relief in the fraternity created by the commonly shared conditions of their existence. They have learned the law of survival, banding together, and can thus cope with misfortune far greater than El Hadji's.

In the novel bourgeois life and values are underscored by the use of imagery related to sight and the act of seeing. Almost every emotional response is evoked in terms of ocular reactions. The characters are even defined by the appearance of their eyes, as in the case of Adja, characterized by the «frankness in her almond-shaped eyes» (p. 11). When she was hurt by El Hadji, «her eyes were lifeless» (p. 14). People are constantly looking away, or down, or at someone, so as to convey pain or disinterest. The co-wives «watch» the third's happiness (p. 23). Adja, unhappy, has «tiny bright dots (shining) in her eyes» (p. 25). When Yay Bineta and the Badyen check to see if N'Gone has been deflowered, they arrive at the door and knock. «The two women *exchanged glances*. A vague anxiety *appeared in their eyes*. The Badyen turned the knob and slowly pushed the door open. She *peered* hesitantly inside. She was met by the blue *light* of the room. Frowning, she *looked around*» (p. 21, my stress).

The characters become cameras, and their expressions poses for the lens of the others—what the existentialists call being-for-others. This imagery recurs throughout the novel and is reinforced by El Hadji's reliance upon «seers» and his vulnerability to the curse of a *blind* beggar. What he doesn't want to see—the obverse image of himself in the street beggars and cripples—is really his own hypocritical, shallow self. A «Hadji» who drinks and steals, evoking his «religious patrimony» to justify his greed and desire for a pretty, young wife, who sleeps through the hours of prayer and seeks a cure from holy men so he can fornicate, whose prosperity is won by theft and who lacks in real charity for the poor—in all respects is really the opposite of a pilgrim of great piety, which is the meaning of the title «Hadji». Sembène describes this man's problems in terms of seeing, since being, for such a superficial and corrupted bourgeois, resides in the eye—in the impressions created by such wedding presents as a car with a bow around it, by Western businessmen's clothes which replace the African dress, and above all, by an awareness of the other as an object to be seen and judged, and which in turn sees and judges on the basis of appearance.

The obvious superiority of the film medium for expressing this theme is reinforced by an extended treatment of the contrast between wealthy and indigent. The wealthy are seen frequently indoors with elaborate clothes and hairdoes, often cleaning and fumigating the foul odors left by the poor. The colors and clothes of the poor complement the washed-out walls and the large expanses of the open space. Eyeglasses, at times ostentatiously manipulated, sunglasses, references to blindness, and meaningful looks exchanged between the women, all call attention to the visual element.

The fourth dimension added on the filmtrack is the music, often that of a *kora*, which, like the insistent intrusions of the *déchets humains* on the barely enclosed space of the wealthy, weaves like the thread that joins the beggar's chant to El Hadji's *xala*. In the film the ideological statement is total: the shocking conditions of the lower classes cannot be hidden from sight. El Hadji's *xala* must become public knowledge, like the Badyen's official verification of his deflowering of his third wife. His checks must bounce in public, in the end, as he goes bankrupt. His fall from fortune's graces must entail the loss of his public position on the board of the Chamber of Commerce. Just as the marabout reimposes the *xala*, the revolution must take place under the gaze of the poor, in whose hatred the dialectical negative is expressed.

This is the meaning of the final scene, that El Hadji's cure must consist in his debasement, as the poor were debased, in his humiliation, which is also their lot, so as to end his isolation from them. Our senses and sensibilities are challenged in this, and in the frankness exposed in the other scenes intended by Sembène not just to *épater la bourgeoisie*, but to force the viewer to confront a painful reality. Only on the basis of such harsh truth can change and growth take place. Only with *clairvoyance* can revolution pass beyond the rhetoric of the established authorities. The collective exorcism of the *xala* at the end, the communal spitting on El Hadji, represents a revolutionary, fetishistic action, and also a class-conscious assertion of cultural values which alone can give life to a real African socialism if it is not to betray itself in the «language» of the oppressor.

In Africa, to change a wealthy, but impotent expropriator into a poor but normal man is no small feat: magic, curses, and a lifetime of dedication are required. For Sembène Ousmane such enormous forces as these lie in the grasp of the people whose power to

change their condition must also be exercised if there is ever to be a revolution. This devotion to the masses and their viewpoint explains his ideological orientation, his turn to filmmaking, and the greater success he achieves in the film rather than in the written version of *Xala*.

NOTES

1 Sembène Ousmane *Xala* (Westport: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1976), trans. Clive Wake. All references to the novel, *Xala*, will be denoted by parenthetical indications to the pages after each quotation. Quotations from the film will be given in French without footnote or page number.

2 «L'Eternel Jugurtha,» *Etudes Méditerranéennes* 2ième trimestre, 1963 11 pp. 53-54.

3 Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1962) pp. 70-71.

THEME AND IMAGERY IN TCHICAYA U TAM'SI'S *A TRICHE COEUR*

EMIL A. MAGEL
Western Illinois University

Outside African literary circles, Gérard Félix Tchicaya U Tam'si is best known for his poetic resemblances to the Negritude poets. The passionate character and explosive energy of his writing suggest a preoccupation with racial consciousness. This can, no doubt, be accounted for by the successful proliferation of Negritude writings and the positive response which these have received from many African and non-African literary critics.¹ But, if we look at him closely, we see that his passion is based on more than a simple rejection of European domination and the reaffirmation of African cultural values; it includes and depends upon the poet's firm faith in man's resilience. U Tam'si reacts to the historical and political realities of African cultural values; it includes and depends upon the poet's firm faith in man's resilience. U Tam'si reacts to the historical and political realities of Africa from a macrocosmic perspective; his reactions *are* contingent upon thoughts and feelings shared by all persons, not just those specifically perceived as belonging to the 'Negro'.² His appeal is to man's inherent dignity and integrity, and not to rhythm and sensuousness. It is in this context that the poet transcends the ethnocentric lamentations and proclamations of a people oppressed and contributes to the exaltation and glorification of man triumphant. This tribute lies in his successful resistance to the threat of spiritual corrosion which the African political, social, and economic realities threaten to evoke within him.

Tchicaya U Tam'si is a dreamer whose imagery partakes of that of the great poets of the world. His vision, like that of Dante, Milton, Eliot or Yeats, is of an earthly paradise, a land of peace and harmony. It is a world of human fraternity, a world freed from

oppression and restraint, where all men are free to be themselves. This personal vision was offered by U Tam'si in the context of an interview with the journal *Afrique* in 1963 where he stated

I am against all the false taboos that constrain a man and prevent him from blossoming. To be free a man must know all, understand all and yes, love all.³

A Triche Coeur,⁴ U Tam'si's third volume of poetry, manifests this same vision of freedom to know and become whatever one's spirit determines. It is only after having been liberated from the restraints of colonialism, Christianity, nationalism, and racism, however, that the poet can experience this freedom. Western terminology has created certain myths about Africans which many Africans themselves have accepted in the definition of their own identities. These fundamental assumptions are part of what U Tam'si calls the false taboos, the restraints placed upon him and his potential development. In order to release himself from them, he must face the reality of the institutional propaganda about himself and Africa and thereby rediscover the true identity behind these masks. Only after discovering himself, can the poet experience the freedom he seeks.

The six free verse poems which comprise the collection «Agony,» «Low Watermark,» «Cheating Heart,» «Strange Agony,» «Equinoctial,» and «The Hearse» provide a cohesive, albeit circuitous, route to this goal. The thematic and metaphoric development of the volume emphasizes the discovery process, marking it ultimately as a search for the poet's own identity.

This progression is enhanced through the poet's dominant use of images of motion. The river, wind, plowing of soil, sea, and funeral procession thrust the poet headlong towards his dream.

The opening poem «Agony» initiates this series by creating a dramatic dialogue between a black boatman and a provocative bird on the banks of a tempestuous river. Searching for the key to his dreams, the boatman agrees to transport a bird across a river of blood. In return, the bird identifies the mysterious pathway to the ferryman's dream-world. The poet introduces the boatman in the second stanza with these lines

a black boatman	un batelier noir
who claimed to know the stars	qui disait tout savoir des étoiles

said that he could cure	dit qu'il guerirait
with the mud of his eyes	avec la boue de ses yeux
sad	tristes
the lepers of their leprosy	les lépreux de leur lèpre
if a tonic love	si un amour tonique
would unloose his arms	lui déliait les bras (U Tam'si, p 11)

The boatman's stated objective is altruistic: he seeks to restore to health those people who are plagued by a disease which is referred to throughout the volume as leprosy. This ulcerous skin condition has the distinct effect of turning the skin of afflicted Africans white. As such, it is a useful metaphor in African literature for the European world and things pertaining to Caucasians. The Europeanization of Africans is presented here as an infection which needs to be cured. But in the boatman's present condition he is unable to effect this miraculous deed. His bound arms metaphorically reflect the psychological state of impotence and inadequacy which prevent him from restoring health to others. He too is a victim of this disease. The associations with the word «déliait» connote unwrapping and untying as if the boatman were bound by bandages and dressings. Although his quest partakes of the universal struggle for self-knowledge, he is initially searching for a curative agent, a savior who will «unloose his arms» so that he might, in turn, cure others.

That the boatman is a dreamer, a star-gazer, is implied both in the line «who claimed to know the stars» and in the futile hope that «he could cure with the mud of his eyes/sad/the lepers of their leprosy». His claim compares his proposed miracles to those of biblical renown, where Jesus Christ, for example, restored sight to the blind man with his own spittle. The reference to a «tonic love» speaks of the curative agent, the medicinal potion that the boatman desires. As the images of the boatman/dreamer evolve, it becomes clear that they are also potent metaphors for the poet himself.

In the third stanza U Tam'si introduces the bird as the potential healer and source of this power with the lines

my name is the key to the dreams	mon nom est clé des songes
i am not leprous	je ne suis pas lépreuse
take me across this river	passe-moi ce fleuve
before you speak my name	avant de dire mon nom

and your arms
will unloose themselves

et tes bras
se délieront (U Tam'sı, p 12)

The image of the bird is presented here as the key to the boatman's dreams. He must seek to understand its identity, to know it and speak its name. If he can discover this, his arms will be unloosed as though by a miracle. The echoing dialogue between these two stanzas is especially intense since, at the end of the first poem, we learn that the bird and the boatman are one and the same person. But the boatman does not at first know himself and hence does not immediately recognize the bird. This understanding will liberate the boatman and allow him to know himself truly. The reflexive *se délieront* is indicative of the direction this discovery process must take. It is to be an internal exploration rather than an externally granted miracle. The arms «will unloose themselves» because the path to self-knowledge is through an understanding of one's self by oneself.

As the key to dreams, the bird becomes a metaphor for the poetic soul, the muse that inspires the poet himself to create, to penetrate the essential truths of life and know himself. The boatman/poet must give himself up to the poetic demands and follow the spirit wherever it leads, even if that direction leads through pain and sorrow. The title of this initial poem, «Agony,» captures the essential nature of the exploratory process. It is to be a movement through the accumulated history of the poet's sufferings, a minute stripping away of all myth, pretense and self-constructed delusions until all his wounds and scars are faced directly. It is significant that the bird directs the boatman across «a lake of blood» for this poetic travelogue is filled with all the blood-stained horrors of colonial exploitation and human debauchery. It is through an exploration of his own and his people's suffering and sadness that the poet-boatman will come to his true identity.

The title of the collection, *A Triche Coeur*, provides a brief insight into this large scale, public exhibition. The word *triche* is often used in reference to the trickery or deceit displayed in board or field games. When allied with *coeur*, the associations of 'love games' and 'betrayal' surface. In the context of his poetry, the revelations might be interpreted as a betrayal of himself and other Africans. The poet's revelation of their sorrows, faults and pains in his search for the truth can be seen as unfaithful, treacherous and disloyal. U Tam'sı recognizes this accusation, accepts the torment

it causes him and yet proceeds with his search. He deliberately goes against the normative rules of 'the game' (the unspoken prohibition against providing ammunition to racist enemies) by exposing African as well as European atrocities.

The third poem of this collection by the same title reiterates this theme of betrayal and supports the above interpretation. There U Tam'si writes

if i have betrayed i know	si j 'ai trahi je sais
what thirst sung harshly	quelle soif chanta rauque
in my severed throat	dans ma gorge coupée
to remain a brother	pour demeurer un frère
at the heart of beaten flesh	au coeur de chair battue
	(U Tam'si, p. 31)

The images of the «severed throat» and the «beaten flesh» pose his central dilemma: how to agitate for change without alienating those who need it most? The poet fears that his poetry, his voice, will not be accepted but instead will be cut off by those who feel it is «sung harshly». He seeks to «remain a brother/at the heart of beaten flesh», for he feels an underlying kinship with the essence and potential that they share. His betrayal of them is likewise his own, for they are together in this public display.

Speaking of this element of suffering in his poetry in an interview in the journal *Continent* 2000, U Tam'si said

I am not personally attracted by suffering. It is not sadness of which I sing but man's effort to liberate himself from it. It is true that I sometimes feel as though I am imprisoned in a ghetto of suffering. However, none of us can forget how much black people suffered in the past as a result of colonialism and slavery. No one can feel really free as long as another man somewhere in the world is being oppressed. Once he has been freed from oppression, this man must, in his turn, liberate his oppressor by helping him to regain a sense of human fraternity.

The bird that sings to the black boatman in these poems inspires him to liberate himself from suffering and oppression. The journey across the lake of blood becomes the pathway to this end with the bird as pilot, navigating their course.

The voyage leads the poet/boatman through the waters of despair and suffering. The depths of this exploration are reflected in the nightmare the boatman experiences in the first poem. In the seventh stanza, the poet writes

listen	écoutez
a wave rocks the boatman	le flot berce le batelier
he sleeps	il dort
he dreams	il rêve
a charnel house	un charnier
offers a feast	ouvre un festin
where his bowels	ou l'on mange
are eaten first	ses vicères d'abord
then his memory	puis sa mémoire
where the putrid bodies	où l'on
eat one another	se mange putride
by the glow of fire-flies	à la lueur des lucioles
which each carries	que chacun porte
before his temples	à ses tempes
as if to resemble	pour ressembler
the Christian god'	au dieu des chrétiens
	(U Tam'si, p. 13)

In this dream the boatman feels himself being eaten away, his limbs, his bowels and his memory. He becomes a man without essence, with neither inward nature nor true substance. He is the feast in this house of death being offered up as a ritualistic sacrifice, paying homage to «the Christian God». Those who are devouring him are striving «to resemble» this God. These images connote associations with the Christian celebration of Mass. Here the boatman is feasted upon, as are the body and blood of Christ. His nightmare is peopled with altar-boys and communicants carrying lighted candles before their faces like «the glow of fire-flies/which each carries before his temples». «As if to resemble the Christian God» emphasizes the objective of their sacrifice and the wholehearted enthusiasm of the participants. They are referred to here as the «putrid bodies» recalling earlier associations with the image of lepers, with decaying skin and bandaged wounds. Those afflicted with the European disease are the communicants in this symbolic nightmare and the boatman is their sacrifice.

The boatman/poet as sacrificial offering concurrently symbolizes Africa and Africans at the hands of the Europeans themselves. The image «his bowels are eaten» recalls references to the exploitation of Africa's natural resources: gold, ivory and copper, the dismemberment of his arms prompts remembrances of the Africans who were taken to be slaves on plantations and forced labor crews in Africa, the loss of his memory recalls the European intellectual's efforts to deny the effectiveness and value of the African past, defining it as a land without history.

After this nightmare-filled sleep, at the end of his navigation, the bird leaves the boatman with its promised key to dreams. In the last stanza U Tam'si writes

1 am your soul farewell	je suis ton âme adieu
my dark body farewell	mon corps obscur adieu
your arms	tes bras
will unloose themselves	délièront
1 am not leprous	je ne suis pas lépreux
	(U Tam'si, p. 16)

Speaking directly to the boatman, the bird informs him that it is his own soul. It bids the black boatman, the «dark body,» farewell, leaving him with the encouraging words «your arms will unloose themselves.» The key to his dreams thus lies within the boatman himself, it is not something external. The message of the bird is unmistakable: it is an invitation to explore his own innermost thoughts and feelings. «I am not leprous» is the boatman's soul's solicitous statement of encouragement. The bird assures him that it is not diseased, that it can be approached and loved without fear of contamination. His true identity is thus not diseased. It is not Europeanized, it does not reflect any traces of whiteness. It is like the boatman himself, reflective of black African culture. It is towards this goal that the boatman quests.

«Agony» becomes the poet's preface to *A Triche Coeur* where he states his methodology, his operational techniques. Accepting the bird's injunction to look within himself, the poet focuses upon himself as he poetically rakes through his memory and his heritage. The subsequent five poems in the volume carry out this internal surgery, revealing the exact nature of the boatman's suffering and sorrow.

This is intimate poetry, exhibiting the poet's attempt to know,

experience and even love himself. Like Dante's dream, his vision demands a movement of the soul from a world corrupted and fallen to one more responsive to his human needs. It is corrupt because it attempts to falsify reality by throwing over it a mantle of deceit. It is a world which seeks to hide the true reality of the African's existence under a guise of 'civilization'. Europeans and Africans alike are guilty of this falsification. The former for initiating it and the latter for perpetuating it. The lines «as if to resemble the Christian God» is both a condemnation of the assimilated African and the assimilator. U Tam'si rejects the Christianizing message of the West and the false identity which it breeds in attempting to hide the cruelty and sufferings of colonial exploitation.

In «Low Watermark,» the second poem of the collection, U Tam'si invites other lost Africans to cast off their false identities and rid themselves of their shame which is the root of their feelings of inferiority and unworthiness. Continuing the river imagery, he asks others to follow him as he explains the nature of his search.

then poison your laughter
and join my voyage

empoisonnez donc votre rire
et soyez de mon voyage

my nailed fetiches
will be bindweed
on the river
born from my throat

mes fétiches à clous
seront liserons
sur le fleuve
né de ma gorge

for the repose of dead trees
in spilling all their sap
make of my mouth a crater
belching this laughter which kills
not an african tom-tom
slobbering the sensual neck of
the moon
without her blushing

pour le repos des arbres morts
en répandant leur sève entière
faites de ma bouche un cratère
crachant ce rire qui tue
sinon un tam-tam nègre
bavant au cou sensuel
de la lune
sans qu'elle rougisse

leave the ashes
take up the black bombs
make of them ramparts
of dark stone
through the grace of solar tides

laissez faire les cendres
prenez les bombes noires
faites-en des états
de grès sombre
par la grâce des étiages solaires

leave my dark hands
take the step
of the counter-dance
because the sun kills
those whom the moon
drives out

laissez faire mes mains sombres
prenez le pas
de la contradanse
car le soleil assassine
celui que la lune débusque
(U Tam'si, pp 23-25)

Traditionally, Congolese boatmen used a vine-like grass from the rivers to lace trees together in the construction of their rafts. On a similar type craft the boatman/poet calls on other victims to travel. But his are special trees, trees on which he reads his false identity, those trees which carried «fruits of an alien culture». His poetry becomes like «bindweed» linking these trees together. U Tam'si empowers it like a potent spirit, injecting magical power into the trees, studded like «nailed fetishes» in order to procure the vengeance of their indwelling spirit to release his false identity. His poetry is likewise defined as molten lava, «belching» forth from his «crater mouth,» engulfing that false identity, carrying it away and solidifying it, turning it into stone.

U Tam'si's poetry is described in opposition to the «African tom-tom» which only beats out a rhythm so embarrassing that it leaves the moon «blushing». This image of the moon and the beat of the African drums recalls the associations of the poetic imagery of the Negritude writers. These repeatedly proclaimed the beauty and wonder of traditional African festivities under the glow of the full moon.¹² However, in light of the harsh realities of the European conquest, these romantic flights into the African past, according to U Tam'si, are merely escape mechanisms which do not produce positive results. His own poetry is neither romantic nor escapist. It establishes a rhythm of dignity by causing men to change their attitudes and behavior to «step the counter-dance» and «leave the ashes» of the past and «take up the black bombs». These images of revolution and counter-insurgency reinforce U Tam'si's dictum against following the status quo as presently defined. It is a movement away from the romantic past, away from the over-indulgent «embarrassing» sentiments of traditional Africa into the light of the «sun,» the light of reality. That reality is presented as deadly for it «kills/those whom the moon drives out». The reference to the «black bombs» characterizes his poetry. Like bombs, it will explode one's false identity and free Africans from ideological and mythical enslavement. The assertion «because the sun kills/those

whom the moon drives out» is the poet's warning to his fellow travelers of the potential result of their flight from the romantic Eden espoused by the Negritude writers. The harsh light of reality, he predicts, will destroy their myths. What they see of their true identity by the light of the «moon» is only partial light, reflected light. It cannot reveal the full truth. The boatman's poetic journey in the full light of the sun, however, promises to accomplish just this.

Thus the poet's dissection of this false identity and his unwrapping of his true identity assumes a definite purpose: to shock and provoke himself and his readers into an acceptance of the bitter reality of suffering and exploitation. The poet himself is not attracted to the ghettos of suffering nor the prisons of the mind, which are the results of these conflicting tensions. Rather he sings of man's efforts to liberate himself from them. His dream of discovering his true essence is attainable in this world because it is a dream of man himself. A dream where men are free to follow the call of their spirit «a spirit which is Protestant, Catholic, Chinese or Negro »¹ Like Yeats he believes that the sources of creation and perfection lie within man himself, not in a divine mind beyond the stars nor in the distant past. Man is his own creator, turning to himself for regeneration.

Two elaborate metaphors dramatically project this regenerative capacity. In «Low Watermark» the poet presents an image which makes his head a «ploughshare,» the cutting edge of a farmer's plow. With this instrument he prepares his soil for sowing. The technical procedures for working this implement are here outlined in miniature, within the poet himself. This microcosmic world is offered as example for others, who are likewise searching for their true identity. In the second stanza of this poem he writes

and blessed be the bread
taken from me
blessed be the thirst
taken from me
open my flesh see me dead
in my blood
and for that blood
make me a smile of foam
I want to cure myself
sea's noise

et béni soit le pain
qu'on m'ôte
bénie soit la soif
qu'on m'ôte
ouvrez ma chair on m'y voit
mort sanglant
et pour ce sang-là
faites-moi un sourire de mousse
je veux me guérir
du bruit de la mer

gulping alone a river alone	gobant seul un fleuve seul
unknown to the whole world	à l'insu de la terre entière
how is it	ça y est
i only hear the rustle of teeth	je n'entends plus que des dents
in the wind	bruire au vent
which blows past the warm head	qui passe la tête chaude
my own head is a ploughshare	ma tête à moi est un soc agraire
but on my earth	mais sur ma terre
not a groove not a furrow	pas une ornière pas un sillon
where is the breast	ou est le giron
of my mother	de ma mère
that i might lay my head high	que j'y mette ma tête haute
before the new moon	avant la nouvelle lune
	(U Tam'si, pp 19-20)

In this metaphor the poet uses his head, his memory to recreate in his poetry the breast of his mother, Africa. He cannot find there a single «furrow» in which was planted his true identity. In his review of his past experience, his search for «the breast of my mother,» he discovered neither grass nor produce sprouting from which he might harvest his being. He found only the fruits of an alien culture. Moreover, this culture left him «dead in my blood.» The poet tells us that he will expose this earth so that he might «cure myself of the sea's noise,» and rid himself of the cacaphony of false pronouncements issuing from Europe across the seas. Like all good farmers, he first tills the soil, ridding it of injurious weeds, plants which would otherwise pollute his harvest and diminish his yield. These blemishes are the fruits of the European culture's plants that he wants to uproot in his poetic tilling. The poet rejoices in the uprooting process as captured in the lines «blessed be the bread taken from me/blessed be the thirst taken from me.» In rhythmic and sonorous lines reminiscent of the Christian Beatitudes, he declares that the European 'Christian' bread no longer nourishes him as the staff of life, for he has finally realized that it does not reflect his experience. His hunger and «thirst» were not satisfied by this foreign produce. Now he labors to regenerate his own fields because he needs new trees and new springs to satisfy him. The image identifies the cultivated field as the body of the boatman/poet himself. The line «open my flesh see me dead in my blood» reveals the uprooting process that he is performing on

himself The poetic use of the imagery of farming transfers the personalized struggle and the essential spirit of the traditional farmer to his own identity struggle Poet and farmer alike battle against adverse conditions, eking out a meaningful existence Both partake of the individual regenerative drive, relying upon resources inherent within themselves The farmer's harvest depends upon his expenditure of energy and his tolerance of suffering The poet/farmer likewise endures pain in his long hours toiling in poetic fields, uprooting the stumps of his false identity and re-seeding his fields with seeds more responsive to the bitter African reality

U Tam'si's subsequent imagery reflects this gradual loss of false self His world has been a prison constructed by foreign architects Movement from this world involves a re-evaluation of Western and Congolese attitudes which form the bricks and mortar of an imagined city The poet's lines in the fourth poem «Strange Agony» capture this re-examination process

«ring out ring out forever,	«sonnez sonnez toujours,
clarions of thoughts»	clarions de la pensée»
but what walls	mais quelles murailles
will fall down	s'écrouleront
what congo be reconquered	quel congo reconquérir
i have flattered my conscience	j'ai câliné ma conscience
burning before it	lui brûlant même tous les encens
all kinds of incense	tous les encens
sleep my conscience sleep	dors ma conscience dors
tomorrow the day will come	demain le jour viendra
what congo is at my country	c'est quel congo mon pays
tomorrow the day will come	demain le jour viendra
there will be windows in the sky	il y aura des fenêtres dans le ciel
with women waving	avec des femmes agitant
their headscarfs in delight	les madras du délire
	(U Tam'si, p 51)

Biblical imagery calls forth connotations of the destruction of Jericho by Joshua's army His soldiers employed trumpets and drums as weapons against the Canaanites On command they «rang out» with such ferocity that the very walls of the city collapsed, leaving it in ruins Like Joshua, U Tam'si uses the trumpets of his brash poetic lines, the penetrating, powerful tones of his verse, to bring down the walls of his subjugated Congo, to free it from all

forms of foreign domination. He proclaims that this freedom will be his, tomorrow, with the repeated line «tomorrow the day will come». It is a freedom worthy of a military victory. With the lines «there will be windows in the sky/with women waving their headscarfs in delight,» he envisions a frenzied celebration where joy knows no bounds, where the sky is open and the clouds dispersed. These lines evoke the immense sense of elation which comes after a hard-won military victory. The guerilla warfare going on within the poet is both rigorous and exacting. Each success in battle moves him one step closer to his true identity.

Anticipating this victory, he bids his conscience to return to sleep «sleep my conscience sleep»—the semi-conscious, dream-like state in which the boatman's/poet's journey is taking place. This is not the sleep of the inactive but that of the creative, a turning in to the natural, creative powers of the individual. It is not an escape from the tragic real-world of the poet but a greater immersion in it, where the conscious mind does not actively suppress painful, bitter memories but allows them to flow freely, unrestrained.

In «Strange Agony» this unrestrained flow traces the poet's psychological defenses that he had established to protect himself from sufferings and pains. In the first stanza he writes

sweating the languor of a blues	SUANT la langueur d'un blues
from head to foot	de la tête aux pieds
listen I shed my pain	écoutez je déchire ma peine à
at each step	chaque pas
I abandon all my limbs	je renonce à tous mes membres
I estrange	je me fais étranger
and cherish myself	et je me chéris
I give up my heart	je requitte mon coeur
I go my way	je m'en vais
my head in my legs	la tête dans mes jambes
to better knot my destiny	pour mieux nouer mon destin
to the grass of the pathways	à l'herbe des chemins
	(U Tam'si, p. 39)

The poet's images play with his own body, surrendering all his «limbs» as though they were individual sorrows. Discarding them for perspective yet keeping them close in line «I estrange and cherish myself» presents an important dichotomy. Consistently throughout the poems, U Tam'si comes to know himself through a

similar process of estrangement and endearment. He releases his sufferings, those which he feels enshroud his true identity, through a series of interlocked images as he metaphorically abandons all his limbs. This review works him into a heated state in which he begins to sweat out, in a sort of curative process, all his sorrows. The lines «sweating the languor of a blues/from head to foot/listen I shed my pain at each step» emphasizes the difficulty and intensity of the exploration. This process forces out all those painful memories which choke him and keep him in a state of mental depression and inactivity.

The poetic movement follows with an onward rush, where the poet «sheds his pains at each step» and «knots» them to «the grass of the pathways» where they will be trampled underfoot. In this image the poet binds his «destiny» with that of the grass, for he wants to be free from that false destiny which does not reflect his true identity. There is neither confusion nor mistake about this trampling process, for the poet's distorted image, placing «my head in my legs» makes this a conscious destruction. The poet's eyes, ears and mind are focused on the grass knotted with his destiny so that it will not escape his attention.

That despised destiny is composed of Western and African ignominies. It has primarily been molded by Western anthropologists and ethnologists. These scientific minds have discovered his origin and traced its development. They are responsible for his own and other's false attitudes and beliefs about him. These reflect the primitive and the savage. This false image is presented by U Tam'si in the following lines»

the lightning
which shatters the night
shows me
my genealogical tree
it was written in fire and flame
that I ought to have
swelling muscles
like a bore
and two geysers or narrow
sexes of honest women
by way of eyes
and participate as privilege
at the inventory

l'éclair
qui dans la nuit éclate
me désigne
l'arbre de ma généalogie
il était écrit en feux et flammes
que je devais avoir
les muscles saillants
comme des raz de marée
et deux geysers ou deux sexes
de femme honnête
en guise d'yeux
et participer en privilégié
à l'inventaire

of earthly springtimes	des printemps terrestres
my soul clearer	mon âme plus lucide
than sap	qu'une sève
with this plastic phosphrescence	avec des phosphrescences
plastiques	

(U Tam'si, p. 41)

The poet's «genealogical tree» was fabricated after conquest, after battles with gun and cannon in «fire and flame» He is the conquered one and therefore defined and categorized by the victors. The false image is that of an animal, all muscle and no brain, his worth lies in his «swelling muscles» He is brute power without mental control like the tidal «bore,» the quick onward rush of a swelling tide as it rushes up a narrow channel. His physical appearance is likewise distorted, having «two geysers of narrow sexes of honest women» for eyes. This image recalls the European artistic preoccupation with the collection of African masks and statuary in an attempt to capture the true essence of the 'African Soul' in museums and galleries.

The phrase «and participate as privilege» reflects the irony and disdain which the poet has for these attitudes, revealing an angry humor. Western man permitted the primitive, mindless African to «participate» at the complete listing of Africa's resources and the birth of mankind, the «inventory of earthly springtimes» The only contribution Africans were allowed to make was as 'guinea pigs' as men of science probed Africa and Africans for clues to the origin of the human species. Their hypotheses revealed that Africans represented the embryonic stage of man's development, the initial layer in the theory of 'social evolution.' The reference to the «earthly springtimes» recalls this search where the African's soul, his essential nature, was seen as «clearer than sap» His essence was pure, simple not contaminated like that of more 'civilized' Western man. He was the 'noble savage'.

But this 'pure native' was «plastic» moldable, capable of being formed by paternalistic Western hands. Western civilization had a mission to uplift and to civilize Africa. It was only after the European nations had completed their work, after Africa had been remade in their likeness that it would be able to give off its own light, to produce a thing of value, to shine of its own accord like «phosphorous» The poet rejects this civilizing mission because it does not reflect the harsh political and economic realities of

process U Tam'si reiterates these false conceptions about his past in order to recognize and release their deep-seated, psychological hold on him. Mimicking in derision, the poet treats these attitudes with scorn and reveals the incongruities on which they are based.

His false identity has likewise been molded by Western historians, who have generally denied the worth of ancient African civilizations. In the absence of written records, their worth cannot be verified or confirmed by European intellectuals. One major source of the poet's agony is his realization that his «history» is one that was written for him in the interests of European exploitation. The poet captures these agonies in the recurring image of the tree. In «Strange Agony» he writes

a bird sang	un oiseau chanta
in my conscience	dans ma conscience
and i fell asleep to retrace	et je m'endormis pour revenir
my steps	sur mes pas
without encountering	sans même rencontrer
even a single tree	un seul arbre
on which to read how	sur lequel lire comment
with feet and hands	des pieds et des mains
my family made its fortune	ma famille fit fortune
naked body and naked soul	nu corps et âme nue
i am a man without history	je suis un homme sans histoire
one morning i came up black	un matin je suis venu noir
against the light	contre la lumière
of setting suns	des soleils couchants
	(U Tam'si, pp 51-52)

The recurring images of the bird and the tree continue the process of self-examination, reminding the poet that he cannot remember his own history. In a sleep-like trance, he searches for his family tree where «my family made its fortune». But the poet does not discover «even a single tree» of his historical roots. He defines himself as «a man without history». The image «naked body and naked soul» presents a defenseless person, one without sense of balance or support. Being a man without history, he cannot establish a sense of identity based on accumulated experience and wisdom. The line «one morning i came up black» highlights the void that exists in his self-concept. All that the poet can hold onto is

his blackness This line refers to the manner in which Western intellectuals had defined him as a man of color, color became his chief identifying characteristic, marking him as inferior His «history» is that of written history, a record of suffering and agony at the hands of slavers, traders and administrators His history and his blackness began «against the light of setting suns» when true darkness began to fall over Africa In the eyes of the rest of the world it became 'the dark continent' a land of blackness, ignorance and savagery After the West 'discovered' it, Africa became what Rudyard Kipling termed 'the white man's burden' The irony in the poet's use of metaphors of light/dark and intelligence/ignorance underscores his bitterness and disdain for the whole exploitative process

«Equinoctial,» the fifth poem in the volume, continues on a macrocosmic scale the agrarian metaphor initiated in «Low Water mark » The metaphor enlarges to celestial proportions as the human regenerative capacity is assumed by an entire continent In this poem Africa is presented through the image of motherhood, the traditional source of human regenerative powers This mother of «three sorrowful centuries» captures the inherent hope and potential for new life that the self-searching process demands Just as the boatman/poet had freed himself from his false identity, so too mother Africa liberates herself by uprooting all the myths and false delusions that plague her In the third stanza U Tam'si writes

through the equinoctial night	par une nuit d'équinoxe
discovering in sorrow	retrouvant désolée
three centuries of her life	trois siècles de sa vie
on the field of her body	sur le champ de son corps
fallow where spreads	en jachère où grouillait
a galloping grass	une herbe galopante
ridden by djinns	chevauchée par des djinns
a bayonet grass	une herbe baïonnette
in the barrel of storms	au canon des orages
she thought that perhaps it was	elle pensa que c'est la peut-être
a grass of the savannahs	une herbe des savanes
simply mischievous	simplement polissonne
the grass showed its claws	l'herbe montra ses griffes
it is a vandal grass	c'est une herbe vandale
the moon is witness	en témoigne la lune
and this grass	et cette herbe

engulfing the body	envahissant le corps
of this woman mother	de cette femme mère
the mother strives against it	la mère lui tint tête
opening wide her arms	ouvrant large ses bras
on the field of her body	sur le champ de son corps
	(U Tam'si, pp 60-61)

In this metaphor, a woman tills her own ground, uprooting «three centuries of her life» «ridden by djinns » These are the false apparitions which exert so powerful a psychological influence on Africa and Africans. They are the same myths and delusions perpetuated by Western intellectuals which the black boatman/poet rid from himself. This mother also prepares her ground «her body/fallow» by roto-tilling the «galloping grass ». This woman discovers that «it is a vandal grass ». The reference to the vandal grass associates her sufferings with those resulting from the occupation of Africa by 20th century Vandals. For U Tam'si, it is out of that tradition of vandalism that the Western powers oppressed and exploited Africa. Because of this exported vandalism, this African woman lived «three centuries of sorrow» and degradation. She thought at first that this sorrow was caused through «mischievousness» but she later saw its «claws,» its brutality and lack of natural, human kindness and sympathy.

Like the boatman, mother Africa «strives against» the false apparitions and mythic stereotypes. She «opens wide her arms» and accepts the reality of the European experience. The agricultural metaphor associates the European presence with injurious weeds, with the image of «bayonet grass,» which has engulfed the entire continent of Africa. Echoing the song of liberation of the boatman, she accepts the bitter reality of exploitation and colonialism as the basis of her true identity. Mother Africa no longer needs to live in shame and humiliation at not being as 'civilized' as Europe. Her recognition and acceptance frees her from its hold, the truth makes her free to be herself according to her own designs.

The poet's rejection of his false identity is not limited to that designed by another culture. He also denies the significance of that perpetuated by Africans themselves. The process of cultural inoculation produced many African miners, mimicking the expression, mannerisms and behavioral patterns of the alien culture. For these Africans, virtue seemed to exist only in the culture of the metropolitan countries. To aspire toward whiteness became the

principal aim of many Africans In the final poem of this volume, «The Hearse,» the poet captures this essential madness with the lines

a cock with feathers
of beautiful colors said
its pure fantasy he sang
without stopping
see here orphan understand
orphan
1 see 1 feel the day 1 see it
1 feel it
see here orphan understand
orphan
1 feel 1 see the night 1 feel it
1 see it
the cock sang
who is the sun it is you cock

un coq aux plus belles couleurs
de plumes dit
c'est pure fantaisie il chanta
sans arrêt
que vois-tu orphelin que sens-tu
orphelin
je vois je sens le jour je le vois
je le sens
que sens-tu orphelin que vois-tu
orphelin
je sens je vois la nuit je la sens
je la vois
le coq chanta
qui est le soleil c'est toi le coq

1 had my decaying teeth
1 could not tell
the orphans that no
this sun was not the sun
that a pipe resembled
the sun better
than this cock with beautiful
false feathers
that 1 had never seen the sun
face to face
for it was night
for centuries without end
for centuries

j'avais ma carie dentaire
je n'ai jamais pu dire
à l'orphelin que non
ce soleil n'était pas le soleil
qu'une pipe ressemble
au soleil
que ce coq aux plus belles
couleurs fausses plumes
que je n'ai jamais vu le soleil
face à face
car il fait nuit
depuis des siècles sans arrêt
depuis des siècles

(U Tam'si, pp 72-73)

The image of the cock «with beautiful false feathers» and that of the «orphan» capture the psychological dependence of the latter on the former. The orphans who «had raved like this for centuries» are repeating the same message which the cock had so arrogantly proclaimed about himself. The cock states that it alone is able to define reality, to know and understand it. This arrogance is presented in the lines «look here orphan understand orphan/1 see 1

feel the day 1 see it 1 feel it» and the subsequent lines «look here orphan understand orphan/1 see 1 feel the day 1 see it 1 feel it» and the subsequent lines «look here orphan understand orphan/1 see 1 feel the night 1 feel it 1 see it » The day/night contrast with the concomitant light/dark associations also refers to the universal good/bad connotations. The image of the cock presented by the poet highlights its supposed omnipotence. These lines thus recall the Europeans' attempts to supplant African modes of thinking and feeling by European ones. The resulting cultural waifs were forced to see reality in a Western context. The colonial cock, proud and combative, exercised complete control over its African flock. As the cock sang, the Africans kept the beat. When the cock asks the rhetorical question, «who is the sun», the orphans obediently reply, «it is you cock »

The image of the orphans displays in figurative language the intrinsic predicament of those Africans who, having lost a sense of their own heritage, found themselves alone and alienated. When they echo the pronouncements of the cock and name it «the sun,» they reveal the depths of their estrangement from self and their total aspirations toward whiteness. These lines reveal a total acceptance of Western cultural, ideological, and intellectual domination. The characterization of Africans as «orphans» reinforces the feelings of general alienation and disaffection.

The boatman/poet, however, rejects this acceptance of and submission to the will of the cock with the lines «1 could not tell the orphans that no/the sun was not the sun/that a pipe resembled the sun better/than this cock with the beautiful false feathers » The ironic comparison of the sun and the pipe is established in mockery of the cock itself. It had claimed to be the sun, the source of light and by metaphorical extension, truth, wisdom and all the associations normally held with the term 'enlightenment'. The cock who significantly wears «beautiful false feathers» cannot, in the mind of the boatman, speak of the truth. Although the feathers are beautiful and potentially mesmerizing, they are basically false.

To the poet the «sun» is more like a «pipe ». As is typical of U Tam'si's poetry, this image is suspended until twenty-two lines later when it again reappears in greater elaboration. It resurfaces as though it had never disappeared, as though it were only waiting for the opportunity to burst forth into the onward rush of fast moving images. U Tam'si writes

the orphan is dead in the storm	l'orphelin est mort dans l'orage
while smoking a clay pipe	en fumant une pipe en terre
of that clay which expects	de cette terre où vint
the explosion	tonner
of dynamite	une dynamite
during the long	pendant de longs
pestiferous centuries	siècles pestiférants
the orphan is dead too dizzy	l'orphelin est mort trop ivre
having smoked the blond sun	d'avoir fumé le soleil blond
in a clay pipe	dans une pipe en terre
fiery and fat	fougueuse et grasse
from the congolese earth	de cette terre congolaise
bloody	sanglante

(U Tam'se, p 75)

The «pipe» of the previously quoted stanza thus is more specifically referred to as a «clay pipe» in these lines. It is a clay pipe made «from that congolese earth/bloody» and looking «all fiery and fat». These associations identify it with all the violence and destruction that the European commanders and their Congolese recruits had wrought while crushing popular resistance movements. The African collaborators, the «orphans» who are «too dizzy/having smoked the blond sun,» participated in the conquest and enjoyed the fruits of its harvest. They were intoxicated with the smoke of the Western ideology and hence «too dizzy,» too confused and bewildered to ground themselves in the reality of their actions. Like the orphans who raved in adulation of the European cock, these waifs, who participated in the extension of Western military programs in the Congo, brought other excruciating pains and sorrows to the boatman/poet. The centuries are referred to as «pestiferous» in order to identify both the disease-laden potential and the pernicious effects of the Western contact. The image of the clay pipe reveals the poet's determination to examine the real history of the Congo with all its disappointments and inconsistencies.

The poet thus realizes that both the external and the internal falsifications of reality must be faced and exorcized from himself. It is in the funeral image of the hearse and its cortege that he bids farewell to them. The movement of the hearse before his eyes symbolizes his final parting from his false identity and the beginning of his acceptance of his true identity. Within the hearse, the body of his metaphorical dead self-image rests in preparation for its final

departure It is a creature imagined out of self-induced pain and agony He writes of that scrutinizing process

then the centuries groaned	puis les siècles grincèrent
from the source to the sky	de la source à la mer
coming from the sky	venant du ciel
coming from the earth	venant de la terre
rolling centuries and centuries	roulant des siècles et des siècles
without ever stopping	sans arrêt toujours
flowering tree with bread	fleurissant l'arbre à pain
whose crust was good	dont l'écorce fut bonne
there is his mortuary bed	voici son lit mortuaire
the estuary where a river	l'estuaire d'un fleuve
meets the sea	à la mer
and following the waif	et suivant l'épave
through the centuries	depuis des siècles
those who wept were dancing	ceux qui pleuraient dansaient
those who danced were weeping	ceux qui dansaient pleuraient
putting earth	mettaient la terre
in their faces	dans leurs visages
and their faces	mettaient leurs visages
in the earth	dans la terre
in that congolese earth	dans cette terre congolaise
	(U Tam'si, p 78)

The telescoping process through time and memories of «three sorrowful centuries» yields positive results The image of «flowering» tree «with bread whose crust was good» contrasts sharply with the previous image of trees that bore only «fruit of an alien culture» in «Strange Agony » This bread is called «good» because it was nurtured on the reality of those «rolling centuries and centuries » Juxtaposed to this image of the flowering tree is the image of the hearse and the «mortuary bed » The death/life contrast emphasizes the transitional shift that has occurred in the boatman/poet Bidding farewell to death and «dead earth ideas,» «terra cotta ideas» the poet welcomes a new life and a new perspective This is implied in his choice of the word *fleurissant*, flowering or blossoming In this sense, his genealogical tree has new life and new growth That blooming results from the poet's deliberate decision to exorcise the «djinnns» from his consciousness and face the bitter realities of African history This search of reality is contained

in the lines «putting earth in their faces/and their faces in the earth /in that congolese earth » This earth, described in earlier imagery as «bloody» and «bloodstained» holds the illusive truth that is sought. In it the true history of the «Congo» can be read. By immersing themselves in this earth, the orphans can discover their true heritage and identities. Like the tree which brings forth new breadfruit, their realization produces joy. Their own exaltation is contained in the lines «those who wept were dancing/those who danced were weeping » All the orphans were thus dancing *and* weeping. The repetition and interchange emphasize the overwhelming happiness and joy experienced by them. They cry in joy and dance in release of excess joy. They, like the boatman/poet, express their happiness at the passing of the hearse and the death of their false identity.

The objective established in the initial poem «Agony» to «cure the lepers of their leprosy» has thus symbolically been realized. The passing of the hearse carries with it the diseased body of Western exploitation and corruption. The «lepers» are released from their sickness. The boatman/poet has developed a methodology through which other afflicted Africans can pass. In the final stanzas U Tam'si writes of his own poetry «if you choose life/i will lend you my tongue/it will be gentle to you,» and thus invites others to join his voyage. The poet offers a means, through his poetry, to freedom and new identity. He sees his poetry, his «tongue» as capable of transforming «dead» Africans into «blossoming» ones.

Tchicaya U Tam'si's imagery dramatically demonstrates man's resilience and capacity to overcome great misfortunes. By focusing upon himself rather than materials or ideologies external to him, the poet is able to reconcile the atrocities suffered in Africa with the realities of his present condition. That he chooses means at the disposal of everyman, underscores the universal applicability of his methods. His suffering is not isolated from that of other human beings, rather it becomes the cohesive bond uniting individuals in the circle of human solidarity. The poet of *A Triche Coeur* has gone far beyond the myopic vision of the Negritude writers. His quest takes its place in the long history of man's continual search for freedom and self-actualization.

NOTES

- 1 Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier *Modern Poetry from Africa* (London Penguin 1963) p 16 Clive Wake, *An Anthology of African and Malagasy Poetry in French* (London Oxford, 1965), p 20 R N Egedu, *Modern African Poetry and the African Predicament* (New York Barnes & Noble 1978), p 44
- 2* Leopold Senghor, Preface *Epitomé* by Tchicaya U Tam'si (Tunis Oswald, 1962), pp 8 10, Hanheinz Jahn, *Muntu An Outline of the New African Culture* trans Marjorie Grene (New York Grove 1961)
- 3 «Tchicaya U Tam'si, poète congolais,» *Afrique* 29 (1963) 43
- 4 Tchicaya U Tam'si *A Triche Coeur* (Paris Caractères 1958)
- 5 «Tchicaya U Tam'si 'Straight to the Heart' » *Continent* 2000 17 (1971), 47
- 6 See Leopold Senghor especially *Chants d'Ombre* (Paris Seuil 1945) *Chants pour Naett* (Paris Seghers 1949) Birago Diop *Leurres et Lueurs* poèmes (Paris Présence Africaine 1967), Bernard Dadié *La ronde des jours* (Paris Seghers 1956)
- 7 *Afrique* p 44

**SATIRE IN AFRICAN LETTERS.
BLACK APPRAISALS OF WHITE
ETHNOLOGISTS IN THE WORKS OF
FERDINAND OYONO, TCHICAYA U'TAM'SI
AND YAMBO OUOLOGUEM**

INGEBORG M KOHN
University of Arizona

In West African literature of French-speaking authorship, there are numerous examples of humor and satire directed against the white man ¹

René Maran, in his prize-winning novel *Batouala* (1921), was among the first to incorporate satirical elements ² He bitterly condemns the French colonial system by revealing some of its most horrendous practices, at the same time, he satirizes individual members of the hated white community through comments aimed at their apparel, their customs, their idiosyncrasies

Almost sixty years later, Seydou Lamine's *The African Princes* (*Les Princes Africains*, 1979), ³ a violent denunciation of corrupted African leaders and their white mentors, again demonstrates the power of satire, and reminds us how skillfully—and how diversely satire has been used since René Maran as comic relief, as a didactic device, and as a weapon both before the liberation and after the beginning of self-rule by African states

Humour and satire embrace a multitude of aspects of the white presence in Africa Their targets have been, for the most part, members of the local colonial administration, but visitors and temporary residents have been singled out as well Among the latter, some of the most interesting examples are the portrayals of white ethnologists Be it the professional researcher or the passionate amateur, their foibles and vices have inspired the African writer to counter with textual responses ranging from a contemptuous com-

ment to a devastating caricature

Just how the white ethnologist is portrayed will be shown by an analysis of selected passages from the works of three prominent African authors the poet Tchicaya U'Tam'si, the novelist Ferdinand Oyono, and the novelist-poet Yambo Ouologuem, to whom the major portion of this study is devoted

In his novel *Chemin d'Europe*,¹ Ferdinand Oyono takes up again the theme of his earlier novel *Houseboy*,² but adds a new element to his stock of characters which previously formed the nucleus of the colonial community the tourist—both visiting explorers and travellers in search of picturesque Africa The novel's hero is Aki-Barnabas, a very bright and opportunistic young native, who has also used the Catholic mission as a springboard for his advancement His goal is to go to Europe, to get an education and improve his fortune To earn the money needed for passage, he becomes a tourist guide at the local hotel run by a French couple It is through his eyes that we see his customers, most of whom arrive on the weekly flight

Every Thursday evening, there poured forth from the plane all these whites wild about the Africa of their dreams, which they had come to explore only to fill all those photo-albums destined to inflame the imagination of a multitudinous and sedentary European bourgeoisie yearning for adventure (p 221, my translation)

At first intrigued and rather amused, he soon becomes scornful of the whole grotesque lot of them, « adventurous knights of both sexes and of all ages,» as he calls them They are always out of breath, weighed down heavily with cameras and binoculars, peering out from beneath enormous pith helmets, he describes them as being « forever hot in pursuit of the noble savage or the secret ritual » He observes them as they ecstatically adjust lenses and light meters in front of some poor old wretch or nude woman they have chanced upon They are ever ready to take notes for that book they hope to write, the great authoritative study on Africa that the world has been waiting for After all, in speaking of this continent, they considered themselves «capable of grasping immediately, and of explaining the unique, the essence of the uncommunicable» (p 221, my trans)

Aki-Barnabas catches on quickly to the idea that there is

money to be made. He becomes the tourists' «local providence,» purveyor of many «formidable, extraordinary, sensational» scenes to be shot by his shutter-happy customers in the bush or in the village. If there is no real marriage ceremony or harvest dance taking place, he stages it, he has at his disposal a group of compatriots ready, at the drop of a hat for the prize of a few bottles of wine, to improvise rituals which, as Aki-Barnabas realizes, makes his explorers « smile with anticipation at the thought of the next cinematographic festival where they were sure to mesmerize the jury and walk away with the *Grand Prix* which would consecrate them Africanists» (p. 222, my trans.)

But these clients are mostly the small-fry, the weekenders, the charter-plan crowd, not to be confused with the professional ethnologist, the serious explorer who belongs in another category. How does he differ from the short-term customer? Here is Aki-Barnabas' judgment:

Oh! Those gentlemen whom I've had the honor to guide across my native bush and forest! Nothing but ambulatory academies, intellectual giants whose honesty, integrity and spirit of abnegation no longer permit them to think of down-to-earth, vulgar necessities such as how to fatten a bank account. That is why they take to the bush, under the august pretense of Science, of Knowledge, in order to search for the Pygmy, or the Negro. I was asking myself, not without some bemused apprehensiveness, under which category of human beings I was to be ranged, as if I ever could be something other than the good-natured Negro kid, for that is what they saw in me, as they looked through their age-old curtain of fantasies which they had spun between-themselves and my country. (p. 52, my trans.)

The character traits referred to in this description closely identify the type of ethnologist Oyono—and, as will be shown, U'Tam'si and Ouologuem as well—have in mind, men who have come under the «august pretense of Science,» but whose primary motive was exploitation, men who are «ambulatory academies,» but whose prejudices and «superstitions made them see Africa and its natives through an «age-old curtain of fantasies.» Oyono reminds us that the white ethnologists have characterized human beings according to their own paternalistic system, which im-

mediately classifies non-European civilization—at best, as immature or child-like, at worst, as animal-like peoples still in their non-age

Aki-Barnabas especially remembers one of them, a certain M Cimetière (Mr Graveyard), who had undertaken the task of convincing the young guide that he was, after all, not descended from the chicken as he had at first been led to believe. When, at night in his hotel room, M Cimetière continues to enlighten him, their conversation is cut short by the arrival of Anatatchia, a black prostitute the ethnologist has engaged. Aki-Barnabas is nauseated, he runs off into the night. The next morning he returns to the Hotel de France, not to report for work, but to demand his wages because he wants to quit. The owner, enraged by so much ungratefulness, has him beaten up by the servants and chased away empty-handed.

Oyono's M Cimetière already anticipates Ouologuem's Fritz Shrobenius. His name—Cimetière (graveyard)—could perhaps be read as a pun, a barb launched against the French ethnologist Maurice Delafosse (la fosse—the grave).⁶ But Oyono's portrayal leaves the matter open to speculation, whereas Ouologuem's character unmistakably points to the German explorer Leo Frobenius.

In his prize-winning novel *Le Devoir de Violence*, Ouologuem savagely attacks both the man and his theories.⁷ In an interview with the *New York Times Book Review* he mentions the extensive research that has gone into the book, there seems to be no doubt that his characterization of the ethnologist is well documented.⁸

The very first mention of the Shrobenius expedition is significant. The Saif, ruler of Nakem, is told of the imminent arrival of some «tourist-explorers who are ethnologists,» wishing to buy «three tons of old wood regardless of cost,» as well as to load up on native masks.⁹ Interestingly, the year is also specified: it is 1910, the year in which, according to a map printed by the Frobenius Institute, the German explorer did indeed journey to a region which might have been a part of the fictitious country of Nakem, traveling inland to a point where lies the town of Katsina, which in the novel becomes Krébbi-Katséna.

Shrobenius is accompanied by his wife Hildegaard and daughter Sonia, and depicted as being primarily a crass merchant, a wholesale dealer of African artifacts.¹⁰ It is only after the bargain has been concluded between him and the Saif—Shrobenius is willing to pay five pounds of gold bullion—that he remembers the

cultural aspects of his mission

He begins to take copious notes while listening avidly to the informants sent by the Saif, while his wife is harassing the interpreter with interminable questions. Daughter Sonia is doing her share of the field work—she has succeeded in attracting the attention of Madoubo, oldest son of the Saif, who « spoke indefatigably of symbols, as did his father, who spouted myths for a whole week ». And what stories they are being told! The worst gibberish, the most incoherent of potpourris, such as, «The night of the Nakem civilization and of African history was brought on by a fatal wind sprung from the will of the Most-High» (p. 102, my trans.)

Shrobenius, of course, is delighted. He is insatiable when it comes to tales and myths—and so « the Saif made up stories, and the interpreter translated. » Ouologuem must have realized that this assertion would raise the question of sources and authenticity of the twelve weighty volumes of *Atlantis*, that huge, impressive compilation of *Volksmärchen* and *Volksdichtungen* Frobenius published between 1921-1928.¹¹ About ten years earlier, he had published a much shorter, one-volume anthology of African stories entitled *The Black Decameron* (*Der Schwarze Dekameron*),¹² a book whose title was no doubt meant to captivate the reader, and whose selections might have inspired Ouologuem to further vilify the hapless German—this time by attacking his penchant for erotica—by casting a slur on his daughter.

For the episode taking place between Sonia and Madoubo in her father's van, parked down by the riverside, leaves little doubt that Ouologuem has cast Sonia in the role of a slut. The afternoon idyll was, if not premeditated, surely anticipated by her—why, for example, would she leave a portable phonograph in the vehicle, if not in anticipation of Madoubo's visit? Another question is, however, whether or not her father expected this kind of cooperation in his «research»—whether or not her blonde, buxom beauty sometimes brought better results than gold bullion when dealing with recalcitrant owners of art treasures or taciturn and unsympathetic storytellers.

A far more serious accusation is levelled at Shrobenius' cultural-historical method, at his attempt to construct a comprehensive theory of the origins and development of Africa's cultural history, and his concept of culture, his *Kulturmorphologie*.¹³ It is with the utmost contempt that Ouologuem speaks of him—Shrobenius—» human crayfish af-

flicted with a groping mania for resuscitating an African universe—cultural autonomy, he called it,» a man who was « determined to find metaphysical meaning in everything, even in the shape of the palaver tree under which the notables met to chat» (*Le Devoir de Violence*, p 102, my trans)

As they go round and round in the courtyard, the Saif and his guest are « reeling off spirituality by the yard,» with Shrobenius « gesticulating at every word, displaying his 'friendship' for Africa, and his tempestuous knowledge with the assurance of a high school student who has earned his diploma by the skin of his teeth» (p 102, my trans)

Here again, Ouologuem's documentation proves to be correct, Shrobenius' model Frobenius' formal education ended with high school As is stated tactfully in an editor's postscript to a sort of *Festschrift* for Frobenius, « he was an apprentice at various museums and universities His doctoral dissertation on *The Origins of African Culture* was rejected by a German faculty, and he turned his back on the universities for good »¹⁴ Frobenius' justification was that « the sources were his real teachers »¹⁵ But the interpretive writings which resulted are, in Ouologuem's judgment, nothing but aesthetic hucksterism He has his Fritz Shrobenius parody passages from Frobenius' major theoretical works,¹⁶ in order to show their vagueness and to condemn his intuitive approach, as well as to prove a point that the one who benefitted most from such exposure of African culture was the pseudo-scientist/explorer eager to earn a profit

Frobenius' concept of culture as «a living essence endowed with form» establishes him among the last representatives of the Romantic school which had for almost a century held an important position in Germany Frobenius claims that one has but to study the forms—statues, masks, jewelry, utensils, etc—in order to become enlightened,¹⁷ and if he sometimes seems to get carried away, Shrobenius' enthusiasm borders on frenzy Such is the case when, inspired by one of the Saif's inventions, he links the cyclical features of the plant and the moon, but then gets carried away

The plant germinates, bears fruit, dies and is reborn when the seed germinates The moon rises to fullness, pales, and vanishes, only to reappear Such is the destiny of man, such is the destiny of Negro art like the seed and the moon, its symbolic seed is devoured by the earth and is reborn sanc-

tified—imbued with the proper requisite to its fulfillment—in the sublime heights of the tragic drama of cosmic play of the stars

And thus, concludes the narrator, «Negro art found its patent of nobility in the folklore of mercantile intellectualism, oye, oye, oye » (*Le Devoir de Violence*, p 110, my trans)

Ouologuem also makes his character repeat a famous, often quoted statement found in Frobenius Shrobenius, we are told, « had been inspired by the All-Powerful to make known the following—a notion stamped with the genius of intuitive lunacy—about the civilization and the past of Nakem 'But these people are disciplined and civilized to the marrow! Everywhere, there are tranquil, wide avenues where one breathes the grandeur, the human genius of a people '» (p 111, my trans)

Shrobenius is portrayed by Ouologuem as «drooling,» a man overwhelmed by his own importance He also comments on the fact that Shrobenius will have derived a two-fold profit on his return home, because, « on the one hand, he mystified the people of his own country who in their enthusiasm raised him to a lofty Sorbonical chair» (Frobenius did indeed receive an honorary professorship from the University of Frankfurt), «while, on the other hand, he exploited the sentimentality of the blacks (sentimentalité négroïde), only too pleased to hear from the mouth of a white man that Africa was the womb of the world and the cradle of civilization» (p 111, my trans)

It is without doubt the accusation of having exploited the sentimentality of certain Africans (la négroïde) that constitutes the most serious grief for Ouologuem In his opinion, Shrobenius/Frobenius has duped them, has preyed upon their eagerness to see themselves exonerated from the stigma of barbarism and primitiveness This condemnation, however, turns out to be a double-edged sword in attacking Shrobenius/Frobenius, Ouologuem castigates not only his own blood brothers, but members of the highest intellectual elite in the world of African letters, among them Senghor and Césaire, the two venerated leaders of the négritude movement

Authors of well-known historical studies and anthologies devoted to the emergence of black francophone literature have dwelled on the fact that, in the 1920s and 1930s, the works of a new school of ethnologists—especially Delafosse and Frobenius—were

eagerly read and commented on by the black students in Paris. These works became, for many of them, «livres de chevet»¹⁸

As Lilyan Kesteloot states, it had been Frobenius who gave African civilization its «patent of nobility», both Senghor and Césaire had «confessed their passion in devouring that book which was entirely devoted to showing the richness and the complexity of African civilization,» and ever since continue in their admiration for the German ethnologist¹⁹

Notable examples of this admiration and respect are an introduction by P. Desroches-Laroche to an article by Frobenius in the *Revue du Monde Noir*, Suzanne Césaire's article «Léo Frobenius et le problème des civilisations,» and Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme*²⁰

It has also been suggested that Cheik Anta Diop has followed a lead indicated by Frobenius, in his *Nations nègres et culture*, a study whose aim is to prove the Negro origins of ancient Egyptians²¹ Articles published in *Présence Africaine*, such as «Léo Frobenius, le Tacite d'Afrique,» are further proof of Frobenius' continuing popularity²²

As for Senghor, his faithful admiration for one of the idols of his youth shows no signs of diminishing. According to Janheinz Jahn, «Senghor is enthusiastic about Frobenius since he—like Frobenius—postulated a homogeneous Negro—African culture»²³ In the forward to *Leo Frobenius, An Anthology*, entitled «The Lessons of Frobenius,» Senghor declares that «no one did more than Frobenius to reveal Africa to the world and the Africans to themselves»²⁴ He reminisces about «the lessons we have learned from reading the work of Frobenius», he remembers how, as a student in Paris, he was «intellectually on familiar terms with the greatest of Africanists and above all the ethnologists and linguists. But suddenly, like a thunderclap came Frobenius! All the history and pre-history of Africa was illuminated, to its very depths. And we still carry the mark of the master in our minds and spirits, like a form of tattooing carried out in the initiation ceremonies in the sacred grove»²⁵

And although today they no longer «carry his works with (them) like a Bible or the Koran when they journey,» Senghor concludes by saying that it was Leo Frobenius who «helped them to achieve the indispensable condition of all independences: the independence of the mind» Therefore, Frobenius is «still their Master»²⁶

It is this principle of superiority—which once again affirms the white man's dominance—that Ouologuem attacks. He reproaches Senghor and others for having let themselves be duped, subjected once more, this time on an intellectual level—worse yet, by a man who by far lacks the academic credentials earned by a Senghor.

Ouologuem also refuses to interpret Shrobenius' «discovery» as a change of ideology brought about by a scientific breakthrough. How could there be, after several centuries of tagging and treating the African according to his «barbarism»—a basic notion advanced primarily to justify the colonial system—a sudden and complete reversal of judgment? The idea that there should come forward and speak out a Maurice Delafosse, a Leo Frobenius contradicting the credo of white cultural supremacy professed by the Gobineaus and Lévy-Bruhls, at a time when colonialism was still firmly entrenched, arouses Ouologuem's ire and suspicion. In his eyes, Shrobenius/Frobenius is but a clever fraud, a «salesman and manufacturer of ideology,» who «assumed the stance of a sphinx to impose his riddles, to justify his caprices and past turnabouts» (*Le Devoir de Violence*, p. 111, my trans.)

At the same time, Ouologuem credits him with setting up an impressive organization:

An African school harnessed to the vapors of magico-religious, cosmological, and mythical symbolism had been born, with the result that for three years men flocked to Nakem—and what men!—straw men, adventurers, apprentice bankers, politicians, salesmen, conspirators—researchers purported to be «scientists,» but in reality enslaved sentries mounting guard before the Shrobeniusological monument of Negro pseudo-symbolism (p. 112, my trans.)

Here again, Ouologuem's statements have some factual basis: the expedition to the region where the fictional Nakem is located lasted indeed three years (from 1910 to 1912), and Frobenius himself wrote that his staff of assistants increased steadily, that he was able to build up the framework of a vast organization.²⁷

While acquiring Negro art, Shrobenius and his followers continued to enlighten a grateful black audience with their new theories. Consequently says Ouologuem, «the niggertrash donated masks and art treasures by the ton to the acolytes of 'Shrobeniusology.' O Lord, a tear for the childlike good nature of

the niggertrash '» (*Le Devoir de Violence*, p 111, my trans)

As to just how lucrative the exchange really was for Shrobenius/Frobenius, one can only speculate « shrewd ethnologist that he was, he sold more than 1,300 pieces, deriving from the collection he had purchased from the Saif and the carloads his disciples had obtained in Nakem free of charge, to the purveyors of funds The Musée de l'Homme in Paris, the museums of London, Basel, Munich, Hamburg and New York And on hundreds of other pieces he collected rental, reproduction, an exhibition fees» (p 112, my trans)

Besides the Musée de l'Homme, which Ouologuem surely has visited, he might have seen others, or read their catalogs, before making the accusation which has been made by other African authors—who have also pointed out the wholesale plunder of Negro art ²⁰

It is with both bitterness and fury that Ouologuem attacks Shrobenius/Frobenius, the man whose profiteering in Negro Art had earned him a castle, a man who had usurped the title of ethnologist and whose theories were but a sham, a bait, their clever presentation notwithstanding

Africans civilized to the very marrow of their bones?

Nonsense, replies Ouologuem, a turncoat philosophy, a clever advertising campaign designated to cheat Africa out of its art treasures, to drum up sales and jack up prices on the international market Ouologuem counters with a savage attack, a devastating caricature of the ethnologist—he has set himself the task of violence—he is determined to retreat to the former, familiar ground he reverts to his «barbarism,» he regains his primitive qualities, because he despises the phony «patents of nobility» offered by the white ethnologist

Finally, the most difficult, the most cryptic portrait of an ethnologist is painted by Tchicaya U'Tam'sr in his surrealistic poetry «Ils danseraient s'ils chantaient selon le rythme de leur marche» belongs to the poetic cycle entitled *Epitomé*, in which the author evokes historical events and scenes from his native land—the bush, the forest, and especially the sea ²¹ Time and time again he speaks of the beaches and dunes where he used to roam, of the seashore where, long ago, « at least six Portuguese slaveships were anchored,» and of that «promenoir,» the seawalk he remembers so well, from which he has watched the ocean—his famous «sea in labour»—which has become a key image in

U'Tam'si's symbolic repertory

It is the beach he uses as a setting for the ethnologist's portrait,
where

The most learned of ethnologists
threw me into the sea
then listened, despite the dark rumblings
inside a seashell
to the rumours of my soul,
this cold noise of the sea
inside a seashell

U'Tam'si's ethnologist is nameless, identified only in his quest to ascertain whether or not the black man has a soul, a question which had preoccupied many a man of letters before and after Montesquieu's famous tongue-in-cheek commentary in his *De l'Esprit des Lois* «One cannot conceive that God, in his infinite wisdom, could have put a soul, especially a good soul, inside an entirely black body »⁹

In depicting the ethnologist listening to the seashell, the author/narrator shows that his irony is directed against both the purpose and the methodology of the research project. And if, in the second verse, it is suggested that he can only laugh at such antics, he nevertheless has « a laugh that kills»—and we dare not forget it!

U'Tam'si's ethnologist may be considered a composite portrait, he is a timeless, a universal figure. But like the slave ships and the savage king, mention must be made of him when recalling Africa's past, lest its history be forever distorted. His anonymous presence in the poem serves as a reminder, he is the image provided by the poet, to be associated with whatever particulars the annals and chronicals of history, ethnology and other research will yield. His nationality, his features, his characteristics are interchangeable, he may represent Oyono's weekend ethnologist or Ouologuem's explorer. And, as Ouologuem has done with Shrobenius, U'Tam'si attacks his integrity by reminding him of his servile attitude. «Boaster, go bow your head/before your savage king,» he tells him in the third verse of the poem, which brings to mind a certain preface by Frobenius, boasting of how « on December 16, 1912, his Majesty the King and Emperor of Prussia, William II, did for the first time listen to him, Frobenius, give a lec-

ture about Africa's culture »¹

The very idea of autodidacts and other unqualified or unscrupulous individuals lecturing presumptuously about African culture has undoubtedly caused much of the anger and resentment harbored against certain ethnologists. Was this not a new way of usurping authority and thus pre-empting once more the rights of a people? The three authors, in the views they expressed on the subject, have rendered an unanimous judgment. Their collective appraisal is negative, it reflects their scorn and contempt. In order to launch a most effective attack, they have resorted to satire—sometimes lofty, often scathing, at times devastating. They have analyzed and then exposed the true motives of some of those who had come in the guise of explorers and researchers: their vanity, greed, and the need to confirm their own prejudices.

At the same time, it is pointed out how their presence and contact brought out the worst characteristics of the native population, it has been shown how deceitfulness, lies and venality compound each other in portraits of people and the sketches of situations drawn with pitiless candor.

To conclude, if we remind ourselves briefly what ethnology is, the study of people studying people—under what circumstances, and for which purpose (an idea almost inseparable from the concept of supremacy attributed to the investigator)—we cannot overlook the fact that among the serious, dedicated ethnologists drawn to Africa there were also men like Delafosse and Frobenius, remembered and scorned because of their ignorance, deceit, and damaging influence. But we also become aware of how skillfully the tables have been turned, how masterfully these ethnologists have been beaten at their own game in the collection of satirical portraits by Ouologuem, Oyono, and Tchicaya U'Tam'si.

NOTES

1 For an in-depth study of how the white person is generally depicted in francophone African literature, see Mineke Schipper de Leeuw, *Le Blanc et l'Occident au miroir du roman négro-africain* (Van Goecum, Netherlands Assen, 1973), and Mineke Schipper de Leeuw, «Le Blanc dans la littérature africaine,» *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch* 29, No 3 (1979), 271-279.

- 2 René Maran *Batouala véritable roman nègre* (Paris Albin Michel, 1921)
- 3 Lamine Seydou *Les Princes Africains* (Paris Editions libres Hallier 1921)
- 4 Ferdinand Oyono, *Chemin d'Europe* (Paris Juillard 1960) All further references to this work appear in the text
- 5 Ferdinand Oyono, *Une Vie de Boy* (Paris Juillard, 1956) Ferdinand Oyono *Houseboy* trans U Reed (London Heinemann, 1966) and Ferdinand Oyono *Boy'* (New York MacMillan, 1970)
- 6 Maurice Delafosse, colonial governor then professor at the Ecole Coloniale des Langues Orientales in Paris Linguist and ethnologist he published grammars and dictionaries of some African languages as well as the following *Les Noirs de l'Afrique* (Paris Payot, 1922), *Civilisations négro africaines* (Paris Stock, 1925), *Les Nègres* (Paris Rieder, 1927), *L'Ame nègre* (Paris Payot, 1927)
- 7 Yambo Ouologuem *Le Devoir de Violence* (Paris Seuil, 1968), Yambo Ouologuem, *The Wages of Violence* trans R Manheim (London Secker and Warburg, 1968), and Yambo Ouologuem *Bound to Violence* (New York Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich 1971, London Heinemann, 1971)
- 8 Mel Watkins, «Talk with Ouologuem, »*The New York Times Book Review*, July 3, 1971, pp 7 and 34
- 9 Ouologuem *Le Devoir de Violence* p 100 my translation All further references to this work appear in text
- 10 Ouologuem's model for Fritz Shrobenius Leo Frobenius, was indeed accompanied by his wife on his exploratory journeys According to Janheinz Jahn, Frobenius « had an able wife—Editha Frobenius—who knew how to drive and repair a car (her husband did not) and who would remember water, food and medical equipment » See Janheinz Jahn *Leo Frobenius The Demonic Child* trans Reinhard Sander, Occasional Publications of the African and Afro-American Research Center, No 8 (Austin University of Texas 1974) The Frobeniuses also had a daughter, but there seems to be no information available on whether or not she accompanied her parents on their journeys
- 11 Leo Frobenius, *Atlantis Volksmärchen und Voksdichtungen Afrikas* 12 vols (Munich Forschungsinstitut Für Kulturmorphologie, 1921 1928), also Leo Frobenius, *Atlantis* (Neudeln Kraus Thompson Ltd 1978)
- 12 Leo Frobenius, *De Schwarze Dekameron Liebe Witz und Heldentum in Inner Afrika* (Berlin Vita Deutsches Verlagshaus, 1910)
- 13 Leo Frobenius, *Paideuma Umriss einer Kultur—und Seelenlehre* (Munich C H Beck, 1921)
- 14 Eike Haberland, ed, *Leo Frobenius An Anthology* (Wiesbaden Franz Steiner Verlag, 1973), p 223 Frobenius himself tells of having changed schools a number of times, since his father's profession necessitated frequent moves, he attended grammar schools in Berlin, Strassburg Lotzen, Glogau, Charlottenburg and Halle (see Leo Frobenius, *Aus den Flegeljahren der Menschheit Bilder des Lebens*

Treiben und Denken der Wilden (Hannover Jänicke, 1901), p xi)

15 Haberland *Leo Frobenius An Anthology* p 223

16 Passages from *Paideuma* and from *Die Kulturgeschichte Afrika* (Zurich Phaidon Verlag 1933)—concerning the African *paideuma* or cultural soul, the concept of culture as «a living essence endowed with form,» the theory of the two civilizations the Hamitic and the Ethiopian—which are presented in the French translations of Frobenius' works *Histoire de la civilisation africaine* (Paris Gallimard 1936) and *Le Destin des civilisations* (Paris Gallimard n d)

17 Central theme of *Paideuma*

18 See especially Lilyan Kesteloot *Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française Naissance d'une littérature* (Bruxelles Université Libre de Bruxelles 1963), Lilyan Kesteloot *Anthologie négro africaine* (Bruxelles Marabout Université, 1967), Robert Cornevin *La Littérature d'Afrique noire* (Paris Payot 1973) and Frantz Fanon *Peau noire Masques Blancs* (Paris Seuil 1952)

19 Lilyan Kesteloot. *Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française* pp 102 103, my translation

20 P Desroches Laroche quoted in *Leo Frobenius The Demonic Child* by Janheinz Jahn, p 19 Suzanne Césaire «Léo Frobenius et le problème des civilisations,» *Tropiques* No 1 (avril 1941), and Aime Césaire *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris Présence Africaine 1955) p 36

21 Cheik Anta Diop, *Nations nègres et culture* (Paris Présence Africaine, 1955)

22 Dualla Misipo, «Léo Frobenius le Tacite de l'Afrique » *Présence Africaine* 1955)

23 Jahn, *Leo Frobenius The Demonic Child* p 5

24 Leopold S Senghor Foreword, *Leo Frobenius An Anthology* ed Eike Haberland p VII

25 Senghor Foreword, *Leo Frobenius, An Anthology* pp XII XIII Senghor has elsewhere expressed his admiration for Frobenius see also Leopold S Senghor, *Liberté I Négritude et Humanisme* (Paris Seuil 1964), pp 80 84 and Leopold S Senghor «L'Accord conciliant,» in *Ansprachen anlässlich der Verleihung des Friedenspreises des deutschen Buchhandels* (Frankfurt Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels, 1968), p 62 According to Janheinz Jahn, Senghor's admiration of Frobenius is based, in part, on a misunderstanding due to an error in the translation of Frobenius' *Die Kulturgeschichte Afrikas* (*Histoire de la civilisation africaine*) see Jahn, *Leo Frobenius The Demonic Child* pp 5-6 Jahn's opinion of his former colleague was that «Frobenius did not have the slightest notion of scholarly conscientiousness, but instead possessed fantasy and intuition» (*Leo Frobenius The Demonic Child*, p 7)

26 Senghor, Foreword, *Leo Frobenius An Anthology* pp XII XIII

27 Haberland, *Leo Frobenius An Anthology* p 20

28 See Camara Laye, *Dramouss* (Paris Plon, 1966), and Robert Zotooumbat,

Histoire d'un enfant trouvé (Yaoundé C L E , 1971) Ouologuem does not allude to the scandal caused by Frobenius in Nigeria (1910) in connection with the excavation of bronze and terra cotta heads «Summoned before an improvised court as a trafficker in illicit goods,» he was asked to make restitution of his major find, the head of the Yoruba sea god Olokun by the British Colonial Mr Partridge In return, he received the «six pounds» he had paid for it (Jahn *Leo Frobenius The Demonic Child* pp 10 11)

29 Tchicaya U'Tam'si, *Epitomé* (Tunis P J Oswald, 1962) poem entitled «Ils danseraient s'ils chantaient selon le rythme de leur marche» (They would dance if they sang to the rhythm of their march) p 113 my translation and Tchicaya U'Tam'si, *Selected Poems* trans Gerald Moore (London Henemann 1972)

30 Montesquieu *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris Garnier 1929) III, p 279

31 Leo Frobenius, *Die Kulturgeschichte Afrikas* p VI

LUANDINO VIEIRA'S SHORT FICTION DECOLONIZATION IN THE THIRD REGISTER*

IRWIN STERN
Columbia University

Contemporary linguistic theory views language as a human artifact, that is, an utensil of man's existence which can be shaped according to his changing conditions and needs.¹ The languages-in-contact phenomenon readily attests to this attitude. We can speak of the influence of ancient Greek on Latin, of Arabic on Spanish, or of French on old English with the resultant linguistic modification or enrichment of Latin, Spanish, and English as some outstanding examples of this phenomenon at work. It has been only within the last quarter century that any serious critical consideration and attention has been given to the literary product of modern examples of languages-in-contact, or to what has been called «bilingual literature»²

African literatures in the twentieth century offer an ample area for the study of the literary aspect of the languages-in-contact phenomenon. Indeed, some investigation has been carried out into the significance of this literature in Africa.³ Such has not been the case for Angolan literature. Because of the 1974 Portuguese revolution, Angolan independence, and the publication of the works of a major contemporary Angolan writer, such an evaluation can now be effected. That writer is José Luandino Vieira, pseudonym of José Vieira Mateus da Graça.

I

Luandino Vieira was born in Portugal in 1935. When he was

three years old, his parents settled in Luanda. He studied at a high school there, and began to work as a mechanic at the age of fifteen. His first political difficulties arose when he was twenty-four as a result of his association with the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (M P L A). After this one month imprisonment in 1959, he was jailed again between 1961 and 1964. He was transferred to the Tarrafal Concentration Camp of the Cape Verde Islands in 1964, where he remained until his release in 1972. His freedom was due to a slight political liberalization in Portugal following the death of the dictator Salazar.

Luandino Vieira's poetry first appeared in the Angolan literary magazine *Cultura* (II), which flourished between 1957 and 1961, and in other Angolan, Portuguese, and foreign cultural publications about Angola between 1957 and 1963. His short stories garnered greater attention, and they were awarded prizes in 1961, 1963, and 1964. It was the attribution in 1965 of the prize of the Portuguese Society of Writers to his collection of short stories entitled *Luuanda* (1963) which was to cause the closing of the Society and the banning of the volume.

In addition to *Luuanda*, Luandino Vieira has published several other volumes of short stories: *A cidade e a infância* (1960), *Vida novas* (written in 1962, published in 1975), *Velhas histórias* (written in 1964, published in 1974), and *No antigamente na vida* (written in 1964, published in 1974).⁴ All these writings were evidently carried out during his years of imprisonment in Angola and in the Tarrafal Concentration Camp. Some of his stories have appeared in French, Russian, and English translations.

The major theme of Luandino Vieira's short fiction is life in the *musseques*, slums, which surround the city of Luanda, Angola. The short stories invoke the *musseques* in every aspect of its «anthropological» existence—its inhabitants, its daily operation, its racial, social, and laboral caste systems, its folklore and oral traditions—through the narrator's childhood remembrances.⁵ The note of socio-political protest—the activities of the nationalist movements and the consequent repressive responses of the Portuguese colonial government through its policies and its PIDE (International Police for the Defense of the State)—are repeatedly alluded to.

It is not the purpose of this paper to study the socio-political content of Luandino Vieira's short fiction, rather, our intention is to investigate the technique he employs to «decolonize» the literary

language of Angolan fiction for both its positive and negative results

II

The very selection of the *nom de plume* José Luandino Vieira is itself a possible indication of the author's awareness of the role that language *must* play in his writings. José is one of the most common Portuguese names. Luandino is a reference to the inhabitant of the city of Luanda. Vieira, yet another part of his real name, evokes the memory of the revered seventeenth century Portuguese Jesuit António Vieira, whose sermons and letters dealing with the Portuguese colonization of Brazil, were not only critical of the Portuguese policies, but were also written in a style considered to epitomize the effective use of the Portuguese language. Thus, through this pseudonym the author suggests a common Angolan-Portuguese writer of Luanda who will reveal his beliefs about his nation through his literary language.

Prior to the publication of Luandino's fiction, the language of Angolan fiction was indistinguishable from that of standard Portuguese fiction. The novels of Castro Soromenho (1910-1968) are perhaps the most notable of Afro-Portuguese writers of our century. 'They reflect a *castiço* (pure) Portuguese both semantically and syntactically. Rarely does his literary language truly reflect Angolan situations and characters. The few Angolan Africanisms serve only to «flavor» the text.

Thus, Luandino Vieira was confronted with a problem common to many African writers. How to aesthetically achieve a national literary language when faced with a dominant colonial language and a varied regional language?' His earliest writings reveal an innovative attitude towards Quimbundo, the Bantu dialect of Luanda,⁸ and its relationship with standard Portuguese. The stories of *Vidas novas* (we were unable to locate a copy of his earlier work *A cidade e a infância*) already contain the linguistic seeds of what will flourish in his later writings. Although his Portuguese in *Vidas novas* is perfectly comprehensible, several Quimbundo words are part of his standard lexicon, and various novel and unusual linguistic features appear.

This modest number of innovations increases in *Luuanda* and attains its peak in *Velhas estórias* and *No antigamente na vida*. It is in these latter two volumes that clear patterns for Luandino Vieira's linguistic innovations based on the languages-in-contact phenomenon become evident.

III

Luandino Vieira's key consideration in his realization of a true Angolan literary language is language register.⁹ Portuguese is the well established, dominating language of the «colonial» figures—the Portuguese administrative officials, the shopkeepers in the *musseques*, the employers. The language of the people of the *musseques* in their conversations, their asides, and in their tales is Quimbundo. When these two social groups come into contact so do their languages and the result is yet a third register of communication which involves code-switching¹⁰ and other linguistic relationships between the two languages. The authorities acutely aware of the role of this third register, as well as the subtle effects achieved through code-switching by each group with regard to the other.¹¹ It is in this third register that Luandino Vieira will reveal a new «decolonized» Angolan literary language, one which borrows and adapts its lexicon and semantics, its morphology and syntax from its two heritages—the Portuguese and the Quimbundo languages.

The normal inclusion of a Quimbundo lexicon in his short fiction has been a double-edged sword for Luandino Vieira. The language does indeed bestow an unique authenticity and immediacy upon the stories and the reality of the situations described. Nonetheless, this leaves the non-Quimbundo speaker (the majority of his readers) in the dark with regard to a vast number of Quimbundo words referring to every day activities, unless, of course, through some Portuguese context or explanation the word, idea, or expression is clarified. Furthermore, there are a substantial number of popular proverbs in Quimbundo, which play an important role in the stories' symbolic significance. This «difficulty» has resulted in a somewhat valid charge of «incomprehensible» being lodged against Luandino Vieira's fiction. To assuage this criticism, the publisher of *No antigamente na vida* saw fit to include translations

into Portuguese of the many Quimbundo passages ¹²

The principal semantic innovation in the creation of this new Angolan literary language is the use of the verb *adiantar* as an auxiliary to suggest the idea of progressive action and movement (e.g., «*adiantava explicar*,»¹³, «*adiantava descobrir*» VE 199, or «*adiantar receber*»¹⁴)

In the lexico-semantic area we have numerous innovations which stand out due to their probable basis in that third register of Luanda speech, to their connotative originality, and to the poetic effect which is achieved. For example, the expression «*cada vez*» does not appear as two separate words, but mainly as one—«*cadavez*» (VE 19, 62, 75, etc., NA 30, 45, 69, etc.). Similarly, «*muitavez*» (VE 159, etc.), «*outravez*» (NA 159). «*Cada qual*» becomes «*cadaqual*» (VE 144, etc., NA 42, etc.). That Luandino Vieira's literary language is still in a state of flux is evident from the occasional use of these expressions in their traditional two word forms.

The use of the process of reduplication, common to most African languages, to express the superlative concept «very» (e.g., «very old») is yet another original lexico-semantic feature of Luandino Vieira's short fiction. The common Portuguese expression «*logo*» (after, then) most often appears as «*logo-logo*» with the repetition through reduplication and the hyphenization providing the expression with a new connotative urgency (VE 18, 39, 141, etc., NA 39, 45, 93, etc.). Similarly, we find other adjectival and adverbial expressions used in the same sort of way: e.g., «*velho-velho*» (VE 51, etc.), «*já-já*» (VE 27, etc.)¹⁵, «*pouco-pouco*» (VE 11, 53, 152, etc.), and «*sempre-sempre*» (VE 22, etc.).

In the morphological area of Luandino Vieira's Angolan literary language Quimbundo vocabulary is developed through the use of Portuguese morphemes. This process includes verbs, their participles, adjectival forms, and nouns: e.g., *bungalar* (to shake) (VE 24, 168, 214), *bungulado* (VE 68), *bungulador* (VE 106), *bungulando* (VE 138), or *xacatar* (to blow) (VE 142, 200, NA 86), *xacateante* (VE 101), *xacateando* (VE 227). The most radical morphological innovations occur with the Quimbundo word *musseque* (occasionally written *muceque*). This noun is submitted to a series of morphological changes which provide the author with new adjectival possibilities: *mussecado* (NA 78), *musseca* (NA 36), *musseco* (NA 89), *mussequeiro* (VE 121, NA 80), *mussequenha* (VE 158, NA 91), *mussequense* (NA 104), *mussequenta* (NA 17),

mussequial (VE 119), *mussequino* (NA 114), *mussequíssima* (NA 60), *mussequóides* (NA 51), and the creation of the collective form *mussecada* (NA 46) ¹⁶

The syntax of Luandino Vieira's characters' speeches and his own narration and digression break with traditional Portuguese syntax. This is especially true with regard to the placement of object pronouns. Furthermore, certain verbs which normally require a preposition (e.g., *estar*, *gostar*) lack it: «gostava os rapazes» (VE 173), «nao gostava o mundo» (NA 73), «está viver» (VE 222), and «começaram cantar» (VE 194). Other verbs are used with non-standard prepositions—«conseguiu de chegar» (VE 225), «nunca chegou de me ensinar» (VE 251), «despedir se com» (VE 58).

The major standard morpho syntactic creations include the use of a third person singular subject pronoun with a second person verbal form—«Você falas» (VE 150), «Foste você, nao é» (VE, 235)—and the use of the collective noun «a gente» with first person plural forms—«A gente vimos» (NA 34), «a gente nem sabíamos» (NA 98) ¹⁷

IV

Let us now summarize Luandino Vieira's approach to the creation of an Angolan literary language. Basing himself apparently on a third register of Luanda speech he refines this product for aesthetic purposes. The basic contribution of the Quimbundo language is with regard to the lexico-semantic area. Aside from a large number of Quimbundo vocabulary words, new shades of meaning are given to common Portuguese words through connotative innovations in their traditional meanings and usages, and through their recreation along African language principles. The major Portuguese linguistic contribution to the Angolan literary language is the former language's wealth of morphemes—principally suffixes—which are used by the author to enrich and enhance his Quimbundo vocabulary. The syntax of Luandino Vieira's short fiction is similarly recreated.

Are there any aesthetic values attributable to these linguistic innovations for Angolan fiction? Indeed, we have a mixed bag. Because of the languages-in-contact phenomenon, Luandino Vieira

has arrived at a literary language which reflects the past and present realities of life in Luanda as no previous nor other contemporary Angolan writer has done.¹⁸ At times, this creativity has led him to almost complete hermeticism, confusing and confounding his readers. An additional limiting aspect of this literary language is that it is basically valid for the western part of Angola—the area surrounding Luanda—because the other regions of Angola use other Bantu dialects. Nonetheless, Luandino Vieira recreates the language of a society and an epoch—as did Eça de Queiroz and Balzac. A positive socio-political purpose must also be attached to this literary language, if for no other reason than that an independent language and a literature are among the first affirmations of nationhood.

NOTES

*This paper was given at the 1978 meeting of the African Literature Association in Boone, North Carolina at Appalachian State University

1 See the various theories on semiology in Ferdinand de Saussure *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959) p. 16, (first French edition in 1915) and Julia Kristeva *Le texte du roman* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), *passim*

2 For a summary of the studies on «bilingual literature», see Gary D. Keller, «Toward a Stylistic Analysis of Bilingual Texts» » *The Analysis of Hispanic Texts: Current Trends in Methodology* (New York: Bilingual Press, 1976), pp. 139-149

3 Among recent publications Vladimir Klíma, et al. *Black Africa Literature and Language* (Prague: Akademie, 1976) and Edgar Wright «The Bilingual/Bicultural African Writer», in Alastair Niven ed. *The Commonwealth Writer Overseas: Themes of Exile and Expatriation* (Brussels: Didier, 1976)

4 These were all published in Portugal. The only publications of his short stories in Angola, to our knowledge, include the original edition of *Luuanda* (1963), and *Duas estórias* which was volume 24 of the «Cadernos Capricórnio», published in Lobito in 1974 which consists of two stories from *Vidas novas*. *Vidas novas* was

vida de Domingos Xavier (French version, 1961, Portuguese version, 1974), which is the basis for Sarah Maldoror's film «Sambizanga». His other novel is *Nós os do Makuluso* (1974), which is studied in Russell Hamilton's article see *infra*. Other studies on Luandino's fiction and language include José Martins Garcia «Luandino Vieira o anti-apartheid» *Colóquio/Letras* (Nov 1974) pp 43-50, Alexandre Pinheiro Torres, *O neo realismo português* Lisboa: Moraes Editores 1977, pp 214-221 and José Cardoso Pires *E Agora José?* Lisboa, Moraes Editores 1977 pp 121-128.

5 Childhood remembrances as a source for fiction are common to African literature. See Nicol Davidson *Africa: A Subjective View* (London, 1964), p 77. Angolan literature's relationship to the rest of African literature is touched on by Hamilton, see *infra*.

6 A general perspective on the language problem of African writers in general and Angolan writers specifically is presented by Russell Hamilton in «Black from White and White from Black: Contradictions of Language in the Angolan Novel» *Ideologies and Literature* 1:1 (Jan 1977) pp 25-57. He also speaks about Castro Soromenho, pp 39-41. On Castro Soromenho, see also Gerald Moser, «Castro Soromenho: an Angolan Realist» *Essays on Afro Portuguese Literature* (University Park, Penn: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1969).

7 In addition to Hamilton, *supra*, see the series of essays edited by Per Wästberg, *The Writer in Modern Africa* (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968). Some specific comments are offered by Mbella Sonné Dusoko.

8 I claim no knowledge of Quimbundo. In my effort to determine the modification of the Quimbundo dialect, I consulted Malcolm Guthrie *Comparative Bantu* (Farnborough, Eng: Gregg International Publishers, Ltd., 1971) 4 vols, and for specific vocabulary, Harry H. Johnston, *A Comparative Study of the Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919), I: 366-377. Johnston calls «Kimbundo» of Luanda «a classical Bantu tongue» (II, 104).

9 «Register» is defined as a «variety in language used for a specific purpose» G. Hartmann *Dictionary of Languages and Linguistics* (New York, John Wiley, 1972), p 194.

10 Code switching is defined as «the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation or interaction. The switch may be for only one word or for several minutes of speech» C. M. Scotton and W. Ury «Bilingual Strategies: The Social Functions of Code Switching» *International Journal of Sociology of Language* 11 (1977), p 5.

11 Excellent examples of code switching appear throughout the story «Maudiê Gil, o Sobral e o Barnil» in *Velhas histórias* (Lisbon: Poliedro 1974), pp 11-45. Luandino Vieira is also concerned with phonological code switching; he makes frequent references to the «português assotacado» (VE 17, etc.) of the Blacks and to the «quimbundo estragado» (Ibid.) of the White Angolans.

- 12 (Lisbon Edições 70, 1974) pp 219 220 Without doubt Luandino Vieira's audience is a Portuguese one principally, and only tangentially an African or non Portuguese one
- 13 *Velhas estórias* p 3 Further references will be in text with the abbreviation *VE* and the page number
- 14 *No antigamente na vida* p 26 Further references will be in the text with the abbreviation *NA* and the page number
- 15 «Já, já» is a common standard Portuguese expression The use of the hyphen to link the words does give it a new connotative appearance
- 16 There are also some innovations in the use of diminutives
- 17 Once again this usage is found in Portuguese fiction as typifying a social class It is not accepted as normal usage by Portuguese writers Luandino Vieira does standardize this usage in his fiction
- 18 Another contemporary Angolan short fiction writer Manuel Rui follows the linguistic footsteps of Castro Soromenho See Manuel Rui, *Regresso Adiado* (Lisbon Plátano Editora 1974)

KAFKA'S INFLUENCE ON CAMARA LAYE'S *LE REGARD DU ROI*

PATRICIA A. DEDUCK
Southwest Texas State University

Camara Laye's *Le Regard du roi* (1954) is undoubtedly one of the most sophisticated and creative novels to emerge from the relatively new body of African literature. It is a novel which not only affirms the writer's significance and depth of creative skill, but also demonstrates his understanding of the thematic and structural aims and potentials of modern fictional endeavor. As his second work, it represents not only an effort to surpass the folklore and «story-telling» atmosphere of his first work, *L'Enfant noir* (which he feared might mark him as a «regionalistic» writer¹), but also an attempt to assimilate into his own fictional creation the structure, techniques, and themes which he found in the works of Franz Kafka. The novel is, very simply, the story of a white European in Africa, who finds himself destitute and unable to comprehend the culture in which he now lives. With some African companions he travels south in hopes of meeting the King and being given a job. He eventually does meet the King and experiences his great radiance.

Laye, in a letter dated 2 January, 1955, discusses in a general way his perception of Kafka's influence, stressing the technical nature of that influence. He writes «Kafka has influenced me, but I don't feel that his influence has gone beyond the aspect of a technique which refers continually to the dream, a technique intended, consequently, to appeal strongly to my African temperament. Kafka's world is not mine»². It is quite obvious that *Le Regard du roi* is imbued with Kafkaesque elements, but Laye is mistaken when he affirms only a technical relationship with Kafka. A close analysis of the novel reveals not only significant influence, but direct imitation in form, style, theme, and characterization. It

is also evident from Laye's letter that he holds definite views on Kafka's fictional world, since he disclaims any connection between what Kafka envisions and what his own fictional world represents. Such an assumption is easily justified, for Laye is obviously interested in some problems foreign to Kafka's intent. He is concerned with the African continent and people, in particular with the *négritude* theme, and these issues move the novel into a realm foreign to Kafka's fictional world.

However, despite Laye's disclaimer of any thematic relationship with Kafka's work, there is a very strong thematic influence apparent in the novel. The quest motif and the problem of the individual in society are important concerns of both Kafka and Laye, and the presence of these themes in Kafka's novels and in *Le Regard du roi* are proof of a significant thematic influence. Therefore, although there are important distinctions to be made in comparing the thematic aims of both writers, it seems to me the distinctions lie not in the essential ideas, but in the overall fictional view and use of those ideas.

I have chosen to work primarily with Kafka's *Castle* in the comparison because so many of the thematic considerations and techniques in Laye seem to point back to this work in particular. In fact, it seems that *The Castle* served as the primary model for Laye's novel.

The opening chapters of *The Castle* and *Le Regard du roi* are particularly fruitful for an examination of the stylistic and technical influences. Already the beginning paragraphs display a number of analogies. Kafka's opening paragraph begins

It was late in the evening when K arrived. The village was deep in snow. The Castle hill was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness, nor was there even a glimmer of light to show that a castle was there. On the wooden bridge leading from the main road to the village, K stood for a long time gazing into the apparent emptiness above him.¹

And Laye's

When Clarence reached the esplanade he found his way blocked by such a vast, dense crowd that at first he felt it would be impossible to get through. He was tempted to turn

back, but he had no say in the matter—he seemed to have had no say in anything for some days now!—and tucking in his elbows, he began to squeeze his way through the crowd ‘

Not only are the form and style of the narrative situation used by Kafka in evidence in Laye's opening, but we also find the particular use of temporal structure, setting, and atmosphere which will ultimately link the thematic concerns of *Le Regard du roi* with those of Kafka in *The Castle*

Kafka introduces us to K by «It was late in the evening when K arrived», Laye introduces us to Clarence by «When Clarence reached the esplanade » We meet both characters with no prior knowledge of their situations, and we move with both, never beyond, as they advance into the story Thus, as in all Kafka's novels, as here in Laye's, the future becomes a true future, completely open, because there is no omniscient consciousness present to anticipate future events

Again, like Kafka's, Laye's first paragraph contains the essence of atmosphere which will pervade the entire novel, and which has a strong relation to the world the author invokes In Kafka's passage the Castle is «veiled in mist and darkness» and there is «apparent emptiness»—an atmosphere which holds a tinge of mystery, uncertainty, even dream or illusion In Laye, such an atmosphere is hinted at also the «dense crowd» surrounding Clarence and later the «fine red dust» which hovers above the crowd are indicative of the uncertainty and mystery which is forever clouding Clarence's perception

Beyond this similarity of temporal and spacial configuration, the very situation proposed in Laye's paragraph shows a striking likeness to Kafka's Kafka begins all three of his novels in a similar way a character is presented who has broken with his past, and we meet him only as he is on the threshold of a new situation ‘K has come to the Castle village to be a land-surveyor, where he comes from we never find out and only in brief flashbacks do we learn anything of his past Clarence, too, is broken from his life with the white men when we meet him, as he had broken before that with the Western world While Laye's techniques of characterization resemble Kafka's, they are also identifiable as elements in the African literary tradition For example, in many African novels, characters are presented at the initiation of a quest, and they are revealed through their present actions, not in reference to their past

situations Laye's artistry in blending such African features with techniques adapted from Kafka is highly original

Going on through the first chapter of *Le Regard du roi* we become aware that Kafka's influence is present not only in the general situation dealt with in the first paragraph, but also in the type of narration, descriptive techniques, characterization, setting, and use of symbols—to the degree that some instances seem to point to direct borrowing on Laye's part. The type of narration in both novels is similar, as even the first paragraphs demonstrate. Despite the use of the past tense in these paragraphs, an atmosphere of presentness emerges from them which will be sustained throughout both works. Kafka adopts the point of view of his protagonist, and frequently resorts to the narrated monologue technique to render his thoughts. For example

K pricked up his ears. So the Castle had recognized him as the Land-Surveyor. That was unpropitious for him, on the one hand, for it meant that the Castle was well informed about him, had estimated all the probable chances, and was taking up the challenge with a smile (p. 7)

Kafka uses this technique so that no temporal gap exists between the narration and what is happening, and consequently, the reader knows only what the character knows, his vision, then, being as limited as that of the character's. It is this same sort of temporal structure that is evident in Laye's writing. Like Kafka, he uses the phrases «he felt,» «it seemed,» etc., rather than straight description, as part of the narrative technique to limit the protagonist's perspective and vision or to distort the reality of the fictional world.

We also find in Kafka the use of a technique that one critic calls «dual description,» referring to the ambiguities evident in the very form of narration. Such ambiguities bring the reader from the very beginning into a «world where presence and absence, affirmation and denial, recognition and bafflement follow rapidly on one another.»⁶ One form which this «dual description» takes is that which has been described as «Aufhebung»⁷ (cancellation), a process whereby the description goes on and on, each statement modifying successively each preceding statement, so that the reader emerges with only various impressions having nothing of the concrete about them, nothing which confirms a particular viewpoint of

reality as true. This particular borrowing of technique can be illustrated by a comparison of Kafka's passage in the first chapter which describes the Castle, and a strikingly similar one in *Le Regard du roi* which describes the palace into which the King disappears. In Kafka we have

It was neither an old stronghold nor a new mansion, but a rambling pile consisting of innumerable small buildings closely packed together and of one or two stories, if K had not known it was a castle he might have taken it for a little town. There was only one tower as far as he could see. It was after all only a wretched-looking town, a huddle of village houses. (pp. 11-12)

In Laye

At first sight it looked like a long, crenellated wall surmounted at intervals by thatched roofs, as if various main buildings were attached to it. The whole was dominated by a central tower whose staircase, constructed on the outside seemed to give access to the sky itself. The general impression was one of sturdiness and strength. The building had more the air of a fortress than of a palace, and its proportions even gave one the feeling that it was a fortified city rather than a mere fortress. (pp. 30-31)

As Kafka's castle appears first as a «rambling pile of small buildings,» then perhaps as a «little town,» and finally as a «huddle of village houses,» Laye's is first a «long crenellated wall,» then a «fortress,» and finally, a «fortified city» in the metamorphosis of appearances. Again, the transformation of people and things is a noticeable element in much African literature. Kafka's influence here is evident not so much in Laye's use of metamorphosis, but in the particular image Laye selects and his use of it. Like Kafka, Laye uses the technique to reflect the obscure and enigmatic nature of the fictional reality. Each impression of the protagonist continually contradicts a preceding one and there is a changing assessment of viewed reality from one perspective. These shifts are abundant in Laye's novel.

It is significant that the technique is used by Laye with precisely the same symbol Kafka uses—a palace, which like the Castle, is

the symbol of the «unknown» for the protagonist. For the palace which Clarence views in the beginning, like the King who inhabits it, is an expression of the mysterious absolute. There are two images in Kafka's description of the Castle which further illustrate the technique of dual description and evoke the atmosphere of the mysterious, both recur in Laye's passage. The first is the tower, which K describes as

firm in line, soaring unfalteringly to its tapering point, topped with red tiles and broad in the roof—an earthly building—what else can men build?—but with a loftier goal than the humble dwelling houses, and a clearer meaning than the muddle of everyday life (p. 12)

The note of ambiguity is struck by the contrast between the «earthly building» and its «soaring»—as if the Castle's nature were physical and spiritual at the same time. Laye also makes such a contrast: his tower «seemed to give access to the sky itself—not that the tower was exceptionally high, but the platform to which the staircase led seemed in a curious way to be level with the sky» (p. 30). We find also the note of uncertainty, the ever-present «but» in Kafka's narration, carried over into Laye's. Kafka's tower has «swarms of (black) crows circling around it,» and this second image, used to intensify further the pervading atmosphere of mystery, is also found in Laye's novel. Not around the tower in particular, but above the palace Clarence observes «vultures hovering in the sky» (p. 34), which are also described later as being black. Such an obvious borrowing seems to indicate Laye's familiarity with *The Castle*.

As the Castle is the central focus in Kafka's novel, the King and his palace form the central focal point in Laye's. Laye's description of the King reveals the same ambiguities and dualistic nature as the palace. Clarence's first view of him is expressed in terms of opposites: he seems at the same time extremely heavy and «miraculously» light. And as the beggar points out to Clarence further on, the King «is young and he is frail—but at the same time he is very old, and very strong» (p. 20). This continual contradictoriness not only imitates, but exaggerates Kafka's technique in mystifying the reader about the true nature of the Castle.

These elements in the first chapter of *Le Regard du roi* indicate a very close adherence to the beginning of *The Castle*. Two more

devices in the novel point to Kafka's influence on Laye: the use of time and the use of space. Both writers dispense with time and space as measurable quantities; instead, time and space reinforce the dream-like atmosphere evoked in description. They continually play tricks on the protagonists' perception. For example, when K starts out from the inn toward the Castle it is morning, but only a few hours later night has come. Laye uses this same situation: we meet Clarence waiting for the King in strong sunlight, but by the time the King has left, darkness is falling. Space is just as unreal: the more K advances toward the Castle, the further away it seems to be. And Clarence continually laments his bad luck in getting nearer the King, despite his efforts to do so. Like K, he seems always to remain on the periphery of success, circling his goal, but incapable of attaining it.

The indefiniteness of spacial data is further reinforced, in Laye as in Kafka, by the use of darkness. An obvious borrowing by Laye is found in the scene in which Clarence looks back at the palace after the King has left. Darkness is beginning to fall and not only clouds the area, but causes physical objects to be distorted:

Then the tower itself seemed to fade away: everything was gradually becoming blurred, as if night were already beginning to fall: and the palace itself seemed to have been moving imperceptibly away. (p. 37)

We need only look back to K's impression at the end of the first chapter of *The Castle* to affirm the origin of this idea: «The Castle above them was already beginning to grow dark and retreated again into the distance» (p. 20).

This very situation presented by the Castle's seeming to move away, which is sustained throughout *The Castle*, has been termed the «Tantalus situation». The protagonist's object of desire is ever-present and there to be grasped, it seems, if only he reaches out for it. But the very action of his striving towards the object causes it to move away beyond his grasp. So the Castle «retreats» as K attempts to approach it, and Laye's palace (as symbol of the King) «moves imperceptibly away» when Clarence concentrates his efforts upon it. In both novels, then, the protagonist stands in the beginning on the periphery of a circle whose center is his goal, and from then on seems never to move beyond that periphery.

A comparison of these first chapters illustrates not only the

technical aspects of Kafka's influence on Laye, but also demonstrates the similarity in the basic plot of the two novels. Like Kafka, Laye outlines the situation to be explored and developed within the remainder of the text. A stranger is presented at the beginning of a new adventure, he is an outsider seeking a way in (K to the Castle village, Clarence, to the black man's world). From the very start the protagonist's goal is identified (for K, the Castle, for Clarence, the King), and subsequent perception of that goal is so distorted and contradictory that the protagonist and reader remain in a baffling and incomprehensible world. The setting is vague, irrelevant, the atmosphere obscure and enigmatic. Each protagonist seeks to make a connection with his goal, and by each that goal is seen as absolute. In the subsequent narration, every effort of the protagonist is directed only toward that one object. At the end of the first chapter both protagonists are exactly where they were in the beginning: each has identified his goal, but is still as far away from it as before and will remain so, if not permanently, at least for some time yet.

When we move into the realm of thematic influence, we discover the point at which Kafka's influence in Laye's novel ends, and Laye's personal ideas begin. Having pointed out the similarity of plot as it develops in the first chapters of *The Castle* and *Le Regard du roi*, we can see that a thematic relationship does exist. Both novels deal primarily with the quest motif, as these first chapters illustrate, however, in terms of the significance and outcome of each protagonist's quest, we find important differences between Kafka and Laye. In Kafka, although 'the possibility of a positive resolution is hinted at,' the quest is not completed, K never reaches his goal. In Laye, it is, Clarence manages to make contact with the King. The break between Kafka and Laye, then, lies in the presence of a positive resolution of the quest in *Le Regard du roi* and its absence in *The Castle*.

Both Kafka and Laye in their beginning chapters emphasize the «absolute» nature of the Castle and King, and these are the objects toward which K and Clarence respectively strive. Kafka's method for rendering K's quest is outlined throughout the remainder of the novel as a series of futile attempts to establish contact with the Castle—attempts as futile as those which Clarence initially makes to reach the South, and in doing so, the King. One futile attempt concerns K's efforts to establish himself in the Castle village. For K, the village provides a point of siege for the Cas-

tle, it is a foothold from which he can begin to establish contact with the Castle. Although he spends a great deal of time orienting himself in that environment, security in the village is in no sense K's final goal. However, it is a necessary element for the potential success of that quest, and thus, in itself becomes an important factor in the K quest. K's quest becomes, thus, a struggle with mundane, insignificant people and situations, since «reaching» the village is a prerequisite for reaching the Castle. Laye uses precisely this situation for Clarence's quest. Clarence must become a part of the African world in order to keep himself in a situation most conducive to meeting the King. And the black world of Laye's novel presents an atmosphere teeming with the same frustrating and enigmatic situations and incidents as those of K's village. Both K and Clarence are pictured as outsiders, both feel their alienation from the new world they have entered, while at the same time both see the necessity for working through, and perhaps in spite of, this frustrating medium to achieve their goals.

In terms of the protagonist's personal approach to his quest, we find the same point of departure in Kafka's and Laye's novels. K states quite emphatically from the start, in his interview with the Mayor: «I don't want any act of favor from the Castle, but my rights» (p. 96). K thus asserts his belief in a state of absolute freedom in which he feels he deserves a share, although at the same time his dependence upon the Castle village and Castle officials puts him in a state of near slavery.

Clarence's approach is initially identical to K's, when he first encounters the beggar who offers to «put in a good word» for him with the King, he vehemently responds that «he was asking no favors of anyone» (p. 13). He goes on, however, to question what his rights really are, and indeed, if they exist at all. It is here that Laye's approach diverges from Kafka's. Although both protagonists approach their quests from the starting point of privilege versus right, their attitudes towards the dichotomy are different, and the subsequent actions of each are based on that personal conception of the meaning of «right» and «privilege».

K sees his quest in terms of exerting his «rights» to reach the Castle and to be recognized officially by it. Association with the Castle is not a privileged state to K's way of thinking, rather, it is his «right». However, his difficulty in getting there, the implied negative attitude the Castle has toward him, and his perception that the Castle views his presence as a «challenge», identify it as the

enemy. Thus, enemy and goal are merged into one in Kafka's world," and the K-Castle relationship becomes that of the protagonist seeking to reach the Castle and the Castle resisting this attempt. The relationship is one of mutual opposition, if not of enmity.

Clarence, on the other hand, sees his quest first in terms of exerting a «right,» if only by his very nature as a white man in this black world, but almost immediately comes to realize that it is a privilege to be allowed to meet the King. Laye emphasizes the point by contrasting Clarence with the beggar who, although the lowest of creatures to Clarence, enjoys a seemingly intimate relationship with the King. Clarence perceives that a connection with the King is a privileged state. We may note that K is aware of the «privilege» enjoyed by those in contact with the Castle, but never does he, as does Clarence, accept the justice of the absolute's inaccessibility.

The beggar character in Laye's novel is important not only for purposes of comparison, but also because he is the one most directly related to Clarence's quest. He is a messenger of the King and is the one who leads Clarence to the South, betrays him eventually, and thus makes it possible for Clarence to reach his goal. In many respects he is modeled upon the Bürgel character in *The Castle*—the character most directly connected with K's quest. Bürgel is the one who offers K the solution to his quest, although K remains oblivious to the opportunity. He leads K to the Castle (as the beggar leads Clarence to the King) not directly, but by presenting K with the formula for reaching his goal. That formula is a presentation of the miraculous situation:

if a man takes a secretary of the Castle by surprise—if the applicant slips through the network of difficulties that is spread over all approaches to the center of authority, then the Castle, in the person of this one secretary, must yield to the intruder, indeed must almost force the granting of the request upon the unsuspecting subject (pp 229-30)

It is significant that when the solution is presented K falls asleep—Kafka here implying that the miracle is beyond human possibility, that in fact, the human consciousness is incapable of ever perceiving it. Laye's beggar, like Bürgel, offers that solution to Clarence, indeed, his very nature is reflective of that solution. He is a black man in a black world and perceives that world from within.

Laye intimates that Clarence, in order to reach the King, must become like the beggar, become that is, a part of the black world by embracing its values and customs. Thus, while K's consciousness is forever closed to Bürger's message, Clarence is led by the beggar and others of the African world to recognize and take advantage of the miracle.

It is, then, in the resolution of the quest that Laye breaks away completely from Kafka. In Kafka we emerge with no resolution, and perhaps no possibility of resolution, for protagonist and absolute are opposed at the end just as they were in the beginning. Indeed, the fact that none of Kafka's novels really «end» seems to indicate that Kafka saw no possibility of positive resolution for the conflicts he presented. Even Kafka's proposed ending for *The Castle*, which Max Brod outlines,¹¹ provides a resolution no more positive than the one which the unfinished work now contains. In this version, K, on his deathbed, receives word from the Castle that he is to be permitted to live and work in the village. Even though the Castle makes a positive gesture for the first time, it is made, ironically, at the very point in K's life when it can have no meaning for him. K's death, in this version, is a negative resolution, if indeed a resolution at all. In Laye's novel, however, there is an ending and resolution of a positive nature. Clarence finds the King and forms a union with him.

In light of these differences between the two novels' endings, we can see significant distinctions between Kafka's and Laye's visions of the world. Kafka's world seems most adequately characterized, as Heller puts it, as «the worst of all possible worlds».¹² It is a world of confusion, contradictoriness, and illusion, a world in which the protagonist moves neither forward nor backward and remains in his adventures far away from his goal. Kafka's protagonist senses that there is something in which he can believe, towards which he can strive, but that something is impossible to define and equally impossible to reach.

In contrast, Laye's world presents a confirmation and a resolution which has spiritual significance. Laye's world may contain much of the confusion, despair, and illusion of Kafka's, but there is also an element of hope within it. It is a hope presented as a chance for completing the quest, for reaching some form of divine absolute and thereby gaining salvation. Although Kafka's world is far more pessimistic than Laye's, Laye seems to have gotten the inspiration for his novel from Kafka. On the title page Laye quotes a

passage from a fragment in one of Kafka's notebooks which goes right to the heart of the novel's theme «The Lord will pass down the corridor, look at the prisoner, and say 'it will not be necessary to lock up this prisoner again he will come with me '»¹³ This is an unusual piece of Kafka, since the prisoner is to be acquitted and redeemed Its theme, perfectly in keeping with the finale of *Le Regard du roi*, is hardly typical of Kafka Yet there is something which Kafka and Laye share in relation to the possibility of salvation or resolution the idea that salvation, if it comes, will come only by some unusual and unmediated circumstance—that is, by a kind of miracle

Although there are instances in Kafka's novels when such miracles occur—as in the Bürgel-K scene mentioned before—the protagonists most often cannot respond to these opportunities Kafka's miracle becomes meaningless, for nothing will ever issue from it It is the supreme irony that it exists and can never be made use of However, in Laye's novel, it is precisely this miracle situation which leads to the fulfillment of the quest It occurs near the end of the novel after Clarence has given up all hope of being worthy enough to be in the King's service Paradoxically, it is at the very moment of self-denial that divine affirmation occurs, the King «looks» at Clarence and opens up the path of salvation, the end of Clarence's quest This great acceptance by the King inevitably recalls the «glance» that Bürgel spoke of to K, which can so simply provide the solution to the quest «there are sometimes opportunities in which by means of a word, a glance, a sign of trust, more can be achieved than by means of life-long exhausting efforts» (p 337) In Kafka, given the conditions under which the miracle is presented, it does not and can never take place In Laye, the miracle is not dependent upon any action of the protagonist, but comes about as a positive act of the absolute and provides gratuitously for the fulfillment of the quest

Even though *Le Regard du roi* grew out of Laye's attempt to assimilate into his own fiction the form, structure, and ideas he found in Kafka, the novel has merit on its own account However, since Laye himself points to Kafka as a chief influence, we must examine and evaluate the novel in terms of its attempted assimilation Laye himself seems to have regretted avowing Kafka's influence, because he feared readers might feel he had plagiarized Kafka Discussing the issue in a letter, he wonders, «Will people say that I have plagiarized Kafka in borrowing his technique rather than that

of Balzac or of Stendhal? It's likely. People would not say that in regard to Dujardin or James Joyce if I had chosen the interior dialogue. But they will say it in reference to Kafka. Why?»¹⁴ One answer might be that Kafka's techniques and devices are so uniquely his own that they become easily identified when they appear in other writers' works. What is more, in Kafka there is unity of technique and overall structure and meaning. The kind of world view he presents is strongly and effectively reinforced by his use of techniques and devices which convey the ambiguity, paradox, and sense of mystery of this perspective. The question then presents itself: can the transposition of Kafka's fictional techniques and devices into a novel whose world view is totally different from Kafka's be truly successful?

One must admit that the Kafkaesque devices lose much of their intricate complexity and ambiguity in a fictional world allowing, as Laye's does, for positive resolution. The incident of the stolen coat in Laye's novel provides a good example. Laye presents the incident as Clarence's tangle with the law, but it is obviously Kafka's law. Since Clarence has no money, he pays his bill at the inn with his coat only to be arrested shortly after for having stolen it back. His companions, in fact, have taken it without his knowledge. The scene which follows presents a court action which is highly reminiscent of Kafka's *Trial*. The incident is an obvious imitation of Kafka's law court and it is not integrally related to the further development of the plot. Laye uses it, it would seem, to reinforce the theme of the white man's ignorance of the African world and ways, but the elaborate imitation of Kafka's conception of the law is somewhat extraneous in *Le Regard du roi*. Laye expresses the seemingly confused and contradictory method of justice of the African world much more effectively later in the novel when he describes the beating of the Master of Ceremonies. In this instance, the situation and description are more in line with the intended theme of the white man's blindness and ignorance and are more effective because they are less Kafkaesque.

Beyond these borrowings of incident, which are for the most part rather artificial, if not gimmicky, there are major stylistic and technical devices which obviously have their source in Kafka, but which Laye uses very effectively in his own fictional creation. Laye uses Kafka's technique of limiting the perspective to the baffled consciousness of the stranger, thereby reinforcing the atmosphere of ambiguity and sense of mystery in his fictional world. He also ef-

fectively uses Kafka's technique of «dual description» with its process of cancellation to express the hero's shifting assessment of viewed reality and to further reinforce the confusion of the protagonist's perception. One element of this technique which is evident throughout Laye's novel is Clarence's blurred perception of reality, and Laye effectively transposes it, with all its Kafkaesque ambiguity and complexity, into his fictional world. Laye uses it with a more lyric intent than Kafka, however, pointing out the beauty, rather than the horror, of the unknown world.

Laye uses the technique of cancellation and blurred perception to demonstrate the growing uncertainty and confusion in Clarence's mind as he becomes integrated into a culture whose beliefs and logic are not characterized by the rigid concepts and set norms of Western society. Clarence's perception not only conveys his confusion, but also demonstrates the slow disintegration of his personality and beliefs. Laye accentuates the mystery of his fictional world by his use of repetition and qualification in much the same way as Kafka, but nevertheless, effectively, within his particular context. Laye also uses dream imagery in combination with blurred perception to suggest the spirituality and the reality that lie beyond rational understanding and which characterize, to him, the black man's particular mode of perception. This is in keeping with his *négritude* theme, which asserts that the black man «feels» rather than «understands» objective experience. However, in terms of overall effect, Laye's use of the Kafkaesque element of blurred perception falls somewhat short in his novel because the world presented is ultimately revealed as an ordered and meaningful world. This world is mysterious and enigmatic to Clarence at first because he is an outsider who tries to understand it rationally from a Western experiential framework, and not, as in Kafka, because it is in itself an incomprehensible world.

Laye, then, seems most often effective in transposing Kafka's technical and stylistic devices into the context of his particular world view when these devices are used to reinforce the ideas inherent in the *négritude* theme. His use of the limited or distorted perspective, the sustaining of a mysterious atmosphere, and the dispensation with time and space as measurable quantities are evidence of this. Laye uses these techniques more often in the first half of the novel than in the second, for it is in the first half that Laye comes closest to presenting a world view which is in many respects similar to Kafka's. It is in the second half of the novel that

Laye presents the possibility of positive resolution, and the Kafkaesque techniques and devices become less meaningful within this context. Laye's moving away from these devices in the second half of the novel, as though to lay the ground for the unKafkaesque resolution, seems to indicate that he himself was aware that they become somewhat shallow and artificial in a world view allowing for positive resolution.

The writing in the second half of *Le Regard du roi* is also more naturalistic, and the ambiguity and contradictions that Clarence experienced at first and in his journey south begin to clear up as he becomes progressively more like the African in his orientation to and perception of reality. The one obvious lapse back into the Kafkaesque world of confusion and distortion in the second part—Clarence's dream about the fish-like women—is quite baffling and unsatisfactory. It does have a relation to Clarence's metamorphosis in that it brings to light the guilt he feels when he judges his sexual exploits while in the South. This guilt ultimately disappears as Clarence rejects traditional Western values and accepts the wisdom of the African world. Yet, Laye's elaborate use of Kafkaesque techniques of description, atmosphere, and symbol here confuses rather than clarifies the meaning and significance of that particular episode.

In light of the vision informing both novels' presentations of the quest, *Le Regard du roi* and *The Castle* present a most striking contrast between absolute fulfillment and indefinite postponement. Laye's world of community, love, and redemption is far removed from Kafka's *Castle* world of isolation, hostility, and alienation. Yet, Laye's moving way from Kafka's world view in the latter part of *Le Regard du roi* is neither a facile nor blindly optimistic adaptation of the Kafkaesque quest. Rather, the novel presents an alternative to the ambiguity and frigidity of Kafka's world: the spiritually fulfilling cosmos that Laye identifies as African society and culture. Although Laye's novel presents a world totally different from Kafka's, Laye's situation links him closely with Kafka. As a black man in a white-dominated world, a Guinean forced into exile in Senegal, Laye shares an affinity with Kafka, that «uneasily assimilated Jew,» whose situation Walter Strauss has characterized as «a threefold social and linguistic exile. German-speaking, in Prague, surrounded in part by unassimilated, Yiddish-speaking Jews, who in turn form an enclave within an Czech-speaking Christian population »¹⁵ While such an affinity perhaps accounts for

Laye's attraction to Kafka, Laye is cognizant that he shares a world with his fellow Africans which bears little relation to the world of Kafka's novels. For, Laye tells us, in pointing to such differences between himself and Kafka, « never have I felt myself to be isolated, abandoned in this spiritual world. On the contrary, I have always felt myself to be intimately and affectionately surrounded by it. I am in it with all those of my race. I feel, in the depths of my soul, this unanimity and support. I have experienced neither that agony nor that tormented and hopeless fate »¹⁶

NOTES

- 1 Fernand Nathan¹ ed, *Camara Laye, Ecrivain Guinéen* (Paris: Librairie de Fernand Nathan, 1964), p. 5
- 2 Nathan, p. 37. The translation is mine.
- 3 Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 4. Subsequent page references will appear in the text.
- 4 Camara Laye, *The Radiance of the King*, trans. James Kirkup (London: Collins, 1956), p. 7. Subsequent page references will appear in the text.
- 5 Austin Warren, «Kosmos Kafka,» in *The Kafka Problem*, ed. Angel Flores (New York: New Directions, 1946), p. 72.
- 6 Ronald Gray, *Kafka's Castle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p. 28.
- 7 Martin Walser, *Beschreibung einer Form Versuch über Franz Kafka* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1961), p. 79 and passim.
- 8 Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1952), p. 200.
- 9 Several critics have pointed to positive elements of affirmation and promise in Kafka's works. See Ronald Gray, *Franz Kafka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 171-72, and Franz Kuna, *Franz Kafka: Literature as Corrective Punishment* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1974), pp. 11, 179.
- 10 Max Lerner, «The Human Voyage,» in *The Kafka Problem*, p. 43.
- 11 Max Brod, in the «Editor's Note to the First American Edition of *The Castle*» as quoted in the «Publisher's Note to the Definitive Edition of *The Castle*» (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. vi.
- 12 Heller, p. 230.
- 13 Camara Laye, *Le Regard du roi* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1954). The quotation was not included in the Collins edition of 1956. The translation is mine.

14 Nathan p 37 The translation is mine

15 Walter A Strauss «Turning Over an Old Leaf » in *The Kafka Debate New Perspectives for Our Time* ed Angel Flores (New York Gordian Press 1977) p 17

16 Nathan p 37 The translation is mine

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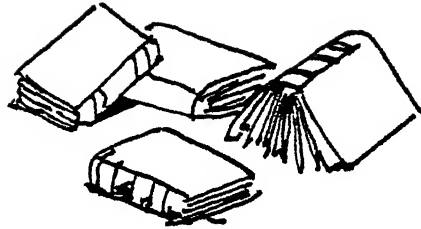
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SPECIAL ISSUE ON MODERNISM AND POST MODERNISM IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN LITERATURE

GUEST EDITOR
Rainer Nägele

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Modernism and Postmodernism The Margins of Articulation Rainer Nägele	5
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Abstract The difference between 'Modernism' and 'Postmodernism' is not one of definitions. The latter is rather a radicalization of a tendency inherent already in Modernism, calling into question the underlying principles of definitions, delimitations and boundaries. If in Modernism this tendency is marked by an increasing self-reflective gesture of the text, Postmodernism radicalizes this self-reflection to the point where the self-reflective circle and its closure are broken. The subversion of demarcation takes place not only on the semantic level, but on the level of the text's literal and linguistic qualities. Such a move displaces particularly any totalizing project, which, for example, is implied in Jürgen Habermas's recent critique of Postmodernism. The following essay traces some of these effects in the development of the German novel of the last two decades and in some examples of experimental and concrete texts, where the reflection on the principle of demarcation leads to the margins of articulation and with that to the margin where the cultural opposition of culture/nature is constituted. (RN)

Avant-garde The Convulsions of a Concept

Michael T. Jones

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Abstract The current status of the «avant garde» provokes many questions which include both inner artistic matters and matters of history and society commonly associated with Marxist or reception oriented thinkers. The convolution of questions cannot be disentangled: efforts to confront the dilemmas of the avant garde cannot abstract from matters of commodification, recent reception, or the complex dialectic of «classical» and «modern». The essay deals with the most recent manifestations of avant garde aesthetic impulses. It emphasizes the *historical* and *social* aspects of German theorizing in contrast to purely formalist or ahistorical conceptions commonly found elsewhere. It insists that such «materialist» theory does greater justice than formalist conceptualizations to the proverbial connections of «art» and «life». It tries to integrate the present phenomenon of proliferating theory into the theoretical exposition as a characteristic trait of the current situation. It warns against abandoning the subversive content of classical modernism in the course of developing a theory of post modernism. (MTJ)

The Gender of Authorship Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf

Helen Fehervary

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Abstract The relationship between sexuality and politics has always been an underlying assumption of the avant garde. In recent East German avant garde literature, the notion of authorship as production has become associated with technological rationality and the patriarchal socialist state. The ensuing crisis of the traditional male author has thus led necessarily to a radicalization of subjectivity and to the politics of gender. A comparison of two contemporary texts, one by a female author, one by a male, shows that the crisis of authorship assumes two distinctly different forms when differences in gender are taken into account. The East German authors Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf have exhibited remarkably similar literary and political developments. Two of their most recent texts, Müller's *Hamletmachine* and Wolf's *No Place Nowhere*, both address the problematic of traditional male authorship and the disintegration of a preconceived literary gender identity. Yet, these two texts exemplify very different assumptions about the relationship between authorship and the literary tradition. Müller's text suggests the imprisonment of the male author within a petrified system of tradition and images, and hence the necessity of deconstruction. Wolf's text manifests a process of creating a new form of female identified authorship and the possibility of redefining the tradition of literature and its future.

Socialist Patriarchy and the Limits of Reform A Reading of Irmtraud Morgner's *Life and Adventures of Troubadora Beatriz as Chronicled by her Minstrel Laura*

Biddy Martin

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Abstract Irmtraud Morgner's *Life and Adventures of Troubadora Beatriz* is one of several important anti patriarchal texts to come out of the GDR over the past ten years. It is a complex and ambitious attempt to elaborate the meaning of women's emancipation in a socialist society, an attempt which is structurally and thematically marked by a struggle between oppositional and orthodox approaches to questions of sexuality, knowledge and power. This particular reading of the text emphasizes the limitations which traditional Marxist analysis and representational practices impose upon a textual field which necessarily introduces conflict and difference into the repressive stability of GDR socialism and its conventional narrative representation. Having made women's radically different desires, experiences and relationships with one another a legitimate subject, the text opens up knowledges which threaten to violate traditional political, social and sexual orders and conventional narrative consistencies. I have attempted to read the text's transgressions and radical oppositions against the pressure of its insistently conclusive Marxism and to suggest the need for a critical rethinking of the relations between sexuality, representation and power. (BM)

In the Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina*

Sara Lennox

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Abstract Bachmann's novel *Malina* is about the absence of a female voice. The unnamed female I of this novel defines herself with respect to two male figures. Malina is her *Doppelgänger*, the voice of male reason which women must assume if they wish to speak at all. In relationship to Ivan, her lover, the I constitutes herself as traditionally feminine and suffers the agonies of romantic love. Though evidently miserable, the I must represent herself as content with her position between these two men, simply inversions of one another. Yet the novel also contains another story of the I which cannot be given coherent narrative form, for there is no way to speak who she really is. In the middle section of the novel, entitled «The Third Man,» the I gives expression to her distress and pain in a series of nightmares in which her father, termed by Bachmann «the murderer whom we all have,» figures as her tormentor. That which patriarchy does not allow to speak here cries out

nonetheless Moreover, counterposed to and subversive of the patriarchal subsumption of women is an archaic and utopian fantasy of sensual joy and freedom which threads its way through the novel Though the I disappears at the end of the novel female desire can't be completely silenced Contemporary feminists thus can use Bachmann by turning this promise of future happiness against the present misery of women which *Malina* depicts (SL)

«Quotation and Literary Echo as Structural Principles in Gabriele Wohmann's *Fruhherbst in Badenweiler* »

Walter H Sokel

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Abstract In her novel of 1978 Wohmann uses the montage technique—quotations literary echoes, erudite allusions—of the «classics of modernism» to put the contemporary West German phenomenon of «New Inwardness» in an ironic light Her protagonist the composer Hubert Frey, retreats from the stresses of contemporary life to the Black Forest spa of Badenweiler New Inwardness in him appears allied to New Conservatism which, in reaction to the New Left of the sixties, revives the old German ideal of the «A Political Man » Echoing a work of restaurative mentality, Stifter's *Nachsommer* Frey's *Fruhherbst* looks back nostalgically on Goethe's classicist phase As Goethe put his Storm and Stress behind him Frey analogously repudiates the turbulent youth of the sixties He sums up his ethos of withdrawal by quoting a passage from one of Goethe's letters He quotes inaccurately and his self-identification with Goethe rests on shaky foundations By revealing her protagonist's erudition as faulty and confused Wohmann unmasks his whole stance as—literally—false Another of Frey's models, Conrad Aiken a writer of inwardness and subjectivity turns out to have been the wrong author for Frey's choice of Badenweiler The American writer who had actually sojourned there turns out to have been the realist Stephen Crane Inwardness thus proves literally incorrect and inappropriate to the protagonist's needs The displacement of the symbolist Aiken by the realist Crane points ahead to the conclusion of the novel Whereas a World War had been needed to dislodge Thomas Mann's Hans Castorp from his retreat, a mere mouse invading Frey's hotel room, serves the analogous function in Wohmann's novel Literary echo a structural device, functions thematically as both the symptom and the cure of her protagonist's passing relapse into German inwardness (WHS)

MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM THE MARGINS OF ARTICULATION

RAINER NAGELE
The Johns Hopkins University

I

Until very recently the term Postmodernism has played hardly any role in German criticism, in contrast to the United States where books, essays, conferences and even a journal are devoted to the description, analysis, exploration and celebration of Postmodernism.¹ That Postmodernism is, however, more than just an American phenomenon or «fad,» as some would like it, is demonstrated by Jean-François Lyotard's incisive study of the «postmodern condition».² A similar analysis and discussion has so far not taken place in Germany. If the term is used at all, it is usually only in passing and often with negative implications. When Jürgen Habermas received the Theodor-W.-Adorno-prize of the city of Frankfurt, he addressed the audience in his acceptance speech with an engaged defense of Modernism against what he considered the neoconservative trend of Postmodernism. But what is Postmodernism?

Among the flourishing number of Isms that have marked the cultural scene since the late 19th century, Postmodernism seems the least tangible, the least definable, perhaps also the most frivolous. In its unashamed assertion of pure temporality it invites that favorite charge of academic critics of being nothing but a fad. The sociologically oriented critic might add the observation that the very term indicates the cultural equivalent of a consumer society where every new product has to be followed by one even newer.

Already the notion of Modernism as a specific historical-cultural term rather than a relative concept has shifted the quality of temporality to the position of content itself. Thus the rapid se-

quence of Isms - naturalism, impressionism, symbolism, expressionism, futurism, vorticism, dadaism, surrealism, cubism, etc —can be considered in a sense the very essence of Modernism the concretization of its principle of pure temporality as content

Postmodernism intensifies that displacement and subverts even more the substantial identity of cultural demarcations Not only is the term itself a doubling of abstract temporality, an ironic redundancy—what else could there be after Modernism but Postmodernism?—it also defines itself by refusing definition, by transgressing borders and boundaries It is *Boundary 2*, as the American journal for Postmodernism calls itself the boundary which always comes 'after,' the indefinite postponement and displacement

To the degree that Postmodernism has a content and self-concept, they consist mainly in terms of negation Its major vocabulary is marked by the de-/dis-prefix A glance through Ihab Hassan's *Paracritisms* provides a paradigmatic catalogue destruction, deconstruction, discontinuity, decentering, the unimaginable, dehumanization, language of silence, self-questioning, self-subversion, self-transcendence, alienation, schism, excess, decadence, dissociation This catalogue, which could be extended, is probably sufficient to illustrate why Postmodernism could be threatening to the concerned humanist Many of these terms as well as the very form of negation were, however, already seen as marks of Modernism In his widely read study on the structure of modern poetry, Hugo Friedrich noted already in the fifties that one particular difficulty in grasping modern poetry since Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Mallarmé was the fact that it seemed to be describable only in terms of negation 'The lines of distinction are no less blurred if one takes a look at the authors and texts Who are the masters of Modernism? Joyce, Kafka, Proust, Rilke, Brecht, Pound, Beckett The list is embarrassingly familiar Ihab Hassan's table of contents in his postmodern study, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*, lists Sade, Surrealism, Hemingway, Kafka, Genet, Beckett Is this the syllabus for a course in Modernism or for one on Postmodernism? One could play the game through the alphabet, as Hassan does it with the letter B «Barth, arthelmy, ecker, eckett, ense, lanchot, orges, recht, urroughs, utor » 'The name of the game could very well be the letter We will come back to this (pretending that we can leave it even for a moment—writing!)

The letters tell us this at least Postmodernism is an extension of Modernism Extending something, however, can mean crossing its boundaries, changing its identity «Postmodernism may be a response, direct or oblique, to the unimaginable which Modernism glimpsed only in its most prophetic moments »⁴ Or is it perhaps only a change in perspective? «The change in Modernism may be called Postmodernism Viewing the former with later eyes, we begin to discern fringe figures closer to us now than the great Moderns »⁶ Who is «us»? Whose «later eyes» are discerning figures on the fringes? For all his perceptiveness, Hassan hesitates to locate the postmodern perspective in its desire for transgression of boundaries as part of an institutional discourse frantically trying to break up the invisible boundaries of academic disciplines and their visual reification in the architectural closure and divisions of the American university campus To say this does not devalue the terms and their discussion To see it as a devaluation would presuppose that there are discourses taking place in a neutral field of interest-free reason To reflect upon its preconditions, pre-texts and interest (inter-esse) is rather in itself a modern-postmodern move Whatever the differences, the most basic mark of modern art is its self-reflective gesture This was the condition of its survival after the Hegelian death-sentence to incorporate its Other, the deadly self-reflection, and make it the source of its life Reflection is inversion, as the romantics already knew That which is reflected does not remain intact it is inverted and displaced Thus self-reflection is both the constitution and the displacement of the self On the level of reflection, the transition from Modernism to Postmodernism takes place wherever the imaginary closure of the self-reflective circle is broken, where the reflecting 'self' and the reflected 'self' no longer meet in the smooth illusion of the full circle, but dive into the rupture which the symbolic order of the signification processes has opened up Thus, when Lacan and Derrida return to Hegel and re-read Hegel, their re-reading of Hegel becomes a displacement of the Hegelian text the closure of the self-identical spirit is ruptured and postponed forever

In doing this, another line of demarcation is blurred that between 'literary' text and 'scholarly' text It is not blurred in the familiar fashion of pseudo-artistic rambling texts, which confuse lack of precision and indulgence in vagueness and dark allusions with art The subversion of the clear demarcation takes place on the level of the text's *littérarité*, on the level of its literal and linguistic

quality. It is, so to speak, a linguistic reflection. This reflection however, is a postmodern reflection in the sense that it does not end in the naive faith that it can ever be in full command of the letter, but that the very reflection upon the letter demonstrates its incessant escape. Thus the traditional demarcation between literary and non-literary text is not simply done away with, but moves within the texts themselves. Postmodern literary texts incorporate critical consciousness, critical texts, to the degree that they are precise and critical, know that they cannot escape the tropes and figures of their language.

Such ruptures and displacements provoke anxieties. The rational, even the humanist order seem threatened. Irrationalism, dehumanization, degeneration were already the terms of condemnation against Modernism, and they have become even more the vocabulary of contemporary debates about postmodern art and criticism. In Germany, this vocabulary of anxiety has a particularly long and strong tradition. In the twenties and thirties Modernism was already under an attack from two quarters. The Nazis launched their attack against the «entartete Kunst» («degenerate art») of the expressionists, dadaists, etc. But there were also strong condemnations from the left in the name of humanism and rationality. The famous expressionism-debate of the thirties set up the fronts between the conservative left, represented most prominently and intelligently by Lukács, who saw expressionist art as part of the destruction of reason, dehumanization and deformation which led to fascism, and on the other hand the avant garde left, represented among others by Ernst Bloch, Brecht and indirectly by Walter Benjamin.⁷ What took place among the German emigrés as mainly a theoretical debate had of course already turned into a practical political-cultural struggle in the Soviet Union. But even on the theoretical level, the debate has left its mark on all subsequent cultural discussions in Germany up to the present.

In a certain sense Habermas' speech in Frankfurt in September 1980 once more exhibits these marks.⁸ In a very ironic turn, the defense of Modernism and the indictment of Postmodernism as Anti-Modernism approximates in a reversed historical constellation the position of Lukács rather than that of Adorno or Benjamin, who are explicitly cited as witnesses. Although Habermas' arguments are explicitly carried by a vocabulary which already in the thirties belonged to the defenders of the modern avant garde, the implicit categories of the antinomy Modernism versus

Postmodernism are closer to Lukács, whose polemical principles are deeply rooted in the 18th century bourgeois enlightenment. I mention Lukács in particular because he is the only one among the conservative anti-modernists who approaches the intellectual power of Habermas. Both are motivated by a strong ethical engagement to come to the support of reason, which they see threatened by the social and political forces of their times. For Lukács it was fascism, for Habermas it is the strong neo-conservative trend in the Western countries, particularly the United States and West Germany. Although politically, the Federal Republic is still ruled by a liberal coalition government, neo-conservative power has grown all the more on the cultural level and in the universities. The fact that Habermas, one of the most prominent and internationally respected philosophers of West Germany, was denied a chair at the University of Munich last year for political reasons is symptomatic of the intellectual climate in the Federal Republic.⁹

It could be argued that Habermas' defense of Modernism is directed less against Postmodernism as I have sketched it above than against certain forms of anti-modernism: cultural trends that seek to reconstruct historicism, traditionalism and the false security of simple answers. The political appeal of these false answers has become dangerously strong in the context of increasing economic insecurity, and their emblematic expression in every-day culture can be found for example in the replacement of the disco-outfit by the cowboy hat in American bars.

Habermas' central concern is the relationship of the different modes of social interaction and communication, and he sees this also as a central concern of the modern avant-garde: on the one hand art becomes increasingly the realm of specialized experts, on the other hand, surrealists, dadaists and others blur the demarcation line between art and non-art. Habermas argues strongly against a false sublation and against a simplistic harmonization, but rejects equally strongly an aestheticism that simply ignores the problem of cultural antagonisms and refuses the attempt at mediation.

It would be difficult to argue against this position *per se*, just as it was difficult to argue against Lukács' defense of reason against the irrationalism and anti-intellectualism of the Nazis. That is it was and is difficult, so long as one enters into the debate on the basis of such dichotomies. In doing so, one enters into the anxiety of a discourse which confuses the subversion of the dichotomy

with one side of that dichotomy in which it remains trapped. When Lukács amalgamated expressionism, modern art and the politics of fascism into one danger, he could no longer differentiate between the art of Trakl, Klee and Schoenberg and the fascist rhetoric. He was trapped by the very rhetoric that he attacked by entering into the dichotomy through which that rhetoric operated. In a similar way, when Habermas identified Postmodernism with Neoconservatism, he blocked out the radically subversive possibilities of Postmodernism and could no longer differentiate between, say, John Gardner and John Barth, or between Jacques Derrida and the so called *nouveaux philosophes*.

On the most fundamental level, Habermas' defense of the «unfinished project of Modernism» can be read as a defense of and an insistence on a totalizing project. This project, in all its acknowledgement of antagonisms, contradictions and dichotomies, has as its purpose a universal public sphere of communication based on a universal grammar of intersubjective intercourse.¹⁰ In contrast to such a totalizing project, Jean-François Lyotard's analysis of the postmodern condition is based on the recognition of radically different language games and leads to an implicit and explicit cultural and political assessment, which sees the possibilities for a progressive praxis in what he calls the «légitimation par la paralogie,»¹¹ which no longer searches for universal consensus, but for a consensus which «doit être local»¹²

II

Our project is such a local one. It is not an attempt to write contemporary German literary history, but rather to search for possible languages, for possible grammars. It is not by chance that in the following contributions women authors are predominant. Feminism has become one of the strongest and most visible political and cultural forces which has articulated the demand not just for equality within the given system, but for the recognition of alternative discourses, alternative modes of expression. Marginality is the decentering center of the postmodern project. What happens at these margins? To what degree can one say that contemporary German literature even approaches the margins? I would like to

trace these questions by taking a closer look at some developments of recent German novels and at the possibilities of experimental literature

The situation of the German novel of the last decade or so is still to a large degree marked by the general transformation of the modern novel since the beginning of this century.¹² But subtle shifts are taking place in the basic elements of the novel which can be seen both as a continuation of the 'modern project' and as a displacement of it

Let's start with the narrator. He/she has been in a rather critical condition ever since the beginning of this century. Already in the thirties J. W. Beach subsumed the modern novel under the heading «Exit Author,»¹³ and at approximately the same time Christopher Caudwell diagnosed the crisis of the novel as an epistemological crisis, as a crisis of narrative perspective.¹⁴ In Germany, Wolfgang Kayser saw the novel threatened by the disappearance of the narrator. And things seem to be getting worse: exile and crisis sound mild and humane compared to the bloody-brutal «execution of the narrator» detected by a critic of the seventies.¹⁵ The bloody metaphor reveals an anxiety which is closely connected with the phantasmatic power struggle of a subject which believes itself in autonomous command over the processes of signification and communicative praxis, only to find itself again and again overtaken by the rules of the game.

A certain self-reflective gesture has, of course, long been a tradition of the modern novel. With a few exceptions, even rather traditional authors use such gestures almost routinely. Many of the narrative figures are professional writers or at least reporters and collectors of data, such as the author/narrator of Heinrich Böll's *Gruppenbild mit Dame* (*Group Picture with Lady*, 1971). But there are modifications noticeable in this tradition. There is a curious undermining of a dogma of literary criticism which is usually already taught to undergraduates: the clear separation between empirical author and fictive narrator. This separation has of course a useful function: to avoid the naive fallacy of identifying opinions expressed by a narrative authority with those of the real author. However, beyond that, this separation—just as the one between empirical I and lyrical I in poetry—is also part of a specific development of modernism and its placement and displacement of art within society. The separation of functions provides the author with the possibility of role-separation. The ideal participation of

the fictive narrator in the universe of literary discourses may be contrasted with the ever more reduced participation of the real author in the public sphere. If the more recent novels subvert this separation, we must see these formal changes as symptoms of historical transformations in the relation between art and society.

What are the symptoms of this shift? A particularly striking phenomenon is the increasing trend towards autobiographical elements in recent German novels. Some, like Thomas Bernhard's *Die Ursache* (*The Cause*, 1975) and *Der Atem* (*The Breath*, 1978) are direct autobiographical accounts. Gunter Grass narrates in his *Tagebuch einer Schnecke* (*Diary of a Snail*, 1972) his experiences during the election campaign for the Social Democrats, and his more recent novel *Der Butt* (*The Flounder*, 1977) is full of often only slightly modified experiences of the author as a private person in his marriage and as a public figure in India and Gdansk. A similar mixture of private and public self-experience structures Max Frisch's novel *Montauk* (1975). Peter Handke's novels *Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied* (*Short Letter, Long Farewell*, 1972) and *Wunschloses Unglück* (*Sorrow Beyond Dreams*, 1972) are not only largely autobiographical, but explicitly thematize the interrelation between experience and fiction.

The examples could be multiplied. Certainly, the autobiographical materials have different functions in these texts. However, they do point in a common direction. The increasing involvement of the empirical author in his texts assumes the involvement of the fiction in the empirical, historical world which it can no longer simply transcend. On the other hand, the empirical world itself is permeated, if not constituted by fiction.

In an exemplary way, this problematic is central to Max Frisch's novel *Montauk*. What is interesting here, as generally in the works of Frisch, are not the existentialist elements, which as such only incessantly run down the dead-end streets of the autonomous subject, but the collision of these elements with the actual act of writing. It is here, where the imaginary I enters into a conflictual relationship with the symbolic order of language, that literature evolves. The tension and rupture in this relationship is manifested in Frisch's work in the paradoxical grammatical form of his narrative subject. As an East German colleague of Frisch, Christa Wolf, has noted while Frisch's fictive work tends to be written in the form of an I-narrator, his diary very rarely uses the word «I».¹⁶ Frisch himself has articulated the paradoxical relation-

ship of the author to his text with reference to Beckett «his work seems far distant from him, and at the same time he is identical with it »¹⁷ The text is the place where the author constitutes and effaces himself at the same time «I, that is I at any time,» we read in Günter Grass's novel *The Flounder* The I here, is given exactly that function which it has according to grammar it is a 'shifter,' a signifier that glides and sometimes occupies that place which we mark with the name 'Günter Grass' But this place itself is not a fixed entity but the site of an effect, of a constellation of texts

As I have indicated earlier, the other side of the fictionalization of the narrator is the fictionalization of the author, who is also a product of his/her text The playful invention in Walter Höllerer's novel *Elephantenuhr (Elephantclock)*, where Oskar Matzerath (the hero of Günter Grass's novel *The Tin Drum*) writes a biography of his author Grass, points to the very real position of the writing subject When Uwe Johnson, with obstinate seriousness, speaks about his figures as if they were real persons, over whom he has no control, and who often seem to control him, and when he enters into a contract with them, this is not just a playful mystification, but the emphatic recognition of the inherent autonomy of a fictive constellation But the fiction also creates the writer Blatantly Herbert Achternbusch writes in *Land in Sicht (Land in Sight)* «In writing I become »

The ambivalence of self-realization and self-alienation in writing becomes especially important for two groups of authors and novels the workers' novel and the women's novel Of particular interest here is not a specific content, but the attempt to create new modes of discourse In this respect, however, the West German novel has not developed very far To be sure, important literary workers' groups were founded in the sixties, such as the Group 61, from which other groups subsequently evolved But to the very degree that the identity of the proletariat as a class has structurally and ideologically lost its clear delineation in late capitalist societies, it becomes problematic for the worker to find his/her own discourse The all-pervasive organization of experience by the bourgeois public sphere and its media apparatus prevents not only the articulation of new modes of experiences but the experience itself If there is a potential for alternative forms of experience, they can appear only negatively in the text, in its gaps and ruptures They appear for example in one of the most successful workers' novels of recent years, in Max von der Grün's *Stellenweise*

Glattis (Slippery Spots) in the form of blind, undeveloped motifs. One of the strongest of these is the deep erotic tension between father and daughter which never comes to the surface but nevertheless creates intensive textual gaps. One could of course argue that these are elements of a bourgeois family drama and of a private sphere, which is only marginal to a novel that grew out of the working world. But to argue in such a way presupposes the dichotomies and antagonisms of the existing public sphere and of a discourse caught in the ruins of the bourgeois ideology.

This situation of a totally controlled, one-dimension discourse, whose authoritarian power is all the more evasive because it cannot be localized in a specific instance of authority and censorship but is instead working through a totalizing internalized structure of experience itself, has become the very basis of some recent feminist texts, in France more so than in Germany. Perhaps the most innovative and artistically most radical feminist novel in the German context is Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* (1971), which has no explicit program or purpose, but confronts the issue of discourse with a deadly poetic intensity. Literary critics have usually found no better label for this radical difference than «subjectivity». They have spoken of regression into the interior world, of loss of the world, as if the world were lost if it is no longer organized by the patriarchal discourse. This discourse is still strongly present in Bachmann's novel. Its voracious violence literally absorbs and devours the female figure. But in this process something emerges which cannot be taken back. Even in its seemingly total ensnarement by the male voice, the female voice emerges in a deadly attempt at articulation. One might describe this novel as the feminist counterpart to Hegel's master-slave dialectic, as a radical articulation of an identity in total self-alienation in the struggle with the other's self-consciousness and with the other's discourse.

The central issue is the articulation of difference, that's why the women's novel is not limited to female authors. A text like Günter Grass's *The Flounder* participates in an essential way in this articulation, not just because the women's movement plays such a prominent role in this novel, but also because of its counter-articulation of male anxieties and phantasms. But what is of special importance here is one of the narrative voices. Besides that shifter-I, which I mentioned before, and which is always a male voice articulating itself around, in, for, and against a female figure, there is also the voice of the flounder. This voice is a shifter in a different

sense First it seems to be the embodiment of patriarchal discourse That is, after all, the reason why the flounder has to appear and defend himself before a women's tribunal As a fish he necessarily evokes phallic symbolism, although this particular fish, a flounder, flat and unshapely as it is, certainly belongs to the borderline of phallic formation, if not deformation But this is its true place the border, the margin where difference and articulation take place It is not whether he speaks for male or female power that defines his place in the text He is not *a* signifier, but *the* central signifier of the text, around, against and through which different articulations shape themselves He is the marker of difference, the blank page on which the letters take shape The articulation of difference may even, as in Peter Handke's *Die linkshandige Frau* (*The Lefthanded Woman*), be an emphatic silence

The problematization of the narrator's status and position necessarily also call into question the status of story and plot This is not simply a formal problem the narrative structure is deeply inscribed with ideological patterns and modes of perception As much as the deconstructive tendencies have become a tradition of the modern and postmodern novel, they have hardly touched the collective consciousness Even sophisticated critics are informed by the deeply ingrained belief that in the story the world presents itself in a natural and undistorted way Typical for this unreflected belief are sentences like «Author X is not an ideologue but a story teller » Little do such critics realize how much they are actually articulating a basic stereotype of political ideology and rhetoric, which attempts to define the constellation and sequence of the existing order as the only possible and natural order The pragmatists are always those who tell the familiar story The identification of history as story has become part of news-reporting, where 'news' events which supposedly make history are explicitly called «stories» («You will hear this story right after this message») The «message» (Kafka's *Botschaft*) interestingly enough is an appeal to the consumer, the rest is fiction Unmistakable too is the narrative gesture and tone of the news reporter, archetypically (re-)presented by the grandfatherly story-teller Walter Cronkite, in whose story telling world and story are reassuringly one «And that's the way it is »

This mode and gesture actually appeal to a humanist tradition which the East-German critic Kurt Batt articulated most explicitly, when he identified the destruction of the narrative form with the

destruction of humanism. Indeed, the subversion of the narrative form is perhaps one of the most provocative challenges to a humanist tradition which claims to know once and for all what the boundaries and identity of 'humanity' are. To the degree that the modern and postmodern project explore the margins of exclusion and inclusion, they evoke the anxiety of 'dehumanization'.

The problems sketched here, obviously, reach far beyond the novel. In the theoretical field, they have manifested themselves especially since the sixties—crudely spoken—in the confrontation between structuralists and hermeneuticians. They also have found expression in the vehement recent debates among historians, who see their field split between more traditional forms of narrative historiography and an increasing structuralization of history through the intrusion of sociology and econometrics. I can only allude here to these larger contexts to indicate the narrative problematic as part of a wider 'postmodern' condition.

Since the middle of the sixties, it was above all Peter Handke who questioned most insistently the apparent naturalness of storytelling. In particular, his early prose texts are explicitly anti-stories, which try to uncover ideological patterns inscribed in the narrative principle. But there is a noticeable ambivalence in Handke's relationship to storytelling. Even his early attacks against stories as deformation and distortion of reality are informed by a deep desire and longing for a world without mediation, a desire which ultimately tries to find its truth again in the simple story.

What we have noticed in regard to the textual subject, the erasure of the borderline between fictive and real narrator, is true of the fiction itself. Recent novels are mimetic not in the sense that they try to represent a reality outside themselves, but in the sense that they uncover and play with organizational patterns which inform both reality and fiction. This is their realism. The more traditional form of this erasure of the delimitation of fiction and reality takes place on the semantic level as a mixture of fantastic and real world, of subjective and objective reality, the more complex and—what I would call—the postmodern form places the problematic into the textual structure itself. These are, of course, only typological poles which are usually mixed in specific texts.

Reality as structured by fiction often appears in the novel as a story structured by another story. But while at the beginning of modernism, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, the great myth inscribes its invisible grammar in an average modern Dublin day, more recent novels are

frequently structured by marginal, even banal stories. Among the favorite ones are patterns of the Western or the detective novel, because in their plot-lines the narrative mechanisms are usually particularly easy to detect. Such patterns, of course, tend to undermine and question the very notion of story and history, because they transform the temporal uniqueness of the event into the repetition of a structure. However, this does not necessarily mean dehistoricization. Grass's novel *The Flounder*, for example, is marked by the dialectic of historical particularity and repetition of story patterns. The pro-programming (prewriting) of life reaches its most precise dialectic in Alexander Kluge's *Lernprozesse mit tödlichem Ausgang* (*Learning Processes with Fatal Endings*). These stories present not only programmed modes of experience and behavior, but also the discrepancy between program and reality. This discrepancy leads formally to a mixture of consequence and inconsequence, continuity and discontinuity, and most frequently the pattern is a program which, in its inflexible consequence, destroys itself and its subject, which is always a subject in the literal sense of the word: subjected to the inscribed program.

These shifts in the function of story-telling receive their strongest impulses on the level of the signifier. Language, not just as a means of representation but as an organizational principle of reality, as potential and real violence, even as the real speaking subject, dominates many of the major texts of the recent decade. This is not only true for such explicitly experimental authors as Oswald Wiener, Helmut Heißenbüttel, and Arno Schmidt, who extended the techniques of concrete texts to the novel. Even in novels which seem to be organized primarily by the semantic surface structure, the literality of the signifiers plays its subversive games more openly than ever. It seems that many authors have become more aware of the power of literality. «He who says paddly must also say pedal,» we read as a seeming nonsense sentence in Herbert Achternbusch's novel *Der Tag wird kommen* (*The Day Will Come*). Its playfulness nevertheless articulates a structural principle of those novels which, while they deal with the power of the signifier, deal also with concrete history.

It is on this level, on the level of the signifier, that experimental art and the modern avant garde move to the margins of Modernism itself and transgress it. The difference can be seen if one compares a work of classical Modernism such as Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* with the experiments of the avant garde. Although Thomas

Mann's novel talks about and reflects about problems and possibilities of experimental art, its own language remains relatively untouched by that which it signifies. Experimental literature, on the other hand, stages those experiments. As a representing medium the meta-language can no longer remain aloof from that which it represents.

The systematic exploration of signification processes goes back to the twenties of this century, but it came to an abrupt end in Germany in the thirties when the Nazis came to power. After the war, young German artists and writers, particularly in the West, where few of the emigrés were welcome and therefore could not play the kind of model role that Brecht, Seghers, Thomas and Heinrich Mann and others had in East Germany, slowly had to reorient themselves and find their place in a tradition of Modernism from which they had been almost completely cut off. Although a strong commitment to a 'pure' language in opposition to the idealized language and rhetoric of the Nazi-period was a primary motivation for many writers, most of these early texts did not probe into the nature of language and signification, but searched for immediacy and existential truth of expression. However, there were a few individual authors and small groups who started to deconstruct the naive representational concept of language and began to experiment with «inventions,» «verbaries» and «montage techniques.» Among the most inventive was the Vienna group with Hans C. Artmann, Friedrich Achleitner, Konrad Bayer, Gerhard Rühm and Oswald Wiener and individual authors such as Eugen Gomringer, Ernst Jandl, Friederike Mayröcker, Franz Mon and Helmut Heißenbüttel. In a certain sense this was the real avant-garde in the German postwar era. All the major innovations and experiments were created by them in the fifties and early sixties. But as far as the literary market and their reception was concerned, they remained marginal. Their texts circulated in small and often extremely short-lived journals or only as manuscripts among friends and only in a very few instances did they reach a larger audience. In the middle sixties and early seventies the situation reversed itself. Increasing numbers of anthologies and experimental texts in book form came out with major publishing houses, reaching a much wider audience. Experimental literature seemed to move from the margins closer to the center. But at the same time there were very few actually new experiments. Most of the publications were either collections of texts written much earlier or variations of already

established experimental techniques. However the change of position within the literary market itself is more than external to a textual praxis concerned with the concrete status of language and text. This positional change affected all the other texts 'innocent' writing was no longer possible for the serious writer.

Moving away from the margin of course threatens at the same time the very essence of an exploratory experimental literature. Integrated subversion runs the danger of being coopted. Indeed the possibilities of integration reach far beyond literature. The techniques of concrete texts and graphics have long since become an essential part of commercial advertising. Eugen Gomringer, the German-Swiss experimentalist also works for advertising firms. The temptation of a moralistic irony and polemic is great in this situation. But perhaps such a degree of integration should rather be a source of surprise for all those who consider experimental art merely an elitist game. If the play of the signifiers indeed can function in the organization of needs and desires by the consumer industry, that means that signifiers are not dead letters but are instead intricately emeshed in the economy of desire. Aesthetic reflection then can no longer disregard this ability of texts to appeal to the desire 'below' the level of semantics through the sensuality of the graphic or spoken letter. Perhaps, in order to become efficiently subversive, the experimental text has to run the risk of cooption, because it cannot circumvent the social and political organization of desire if it wants to enter into the economy of desire at all, and without that economy there are no human effects. There would indeed only be the dead letter.

Generally academic literary criticism does not esteem the letter very highly. The dominant model is still representational: a word = a thing. Linguists have known of course for a long time that the constitution of meaning takes place 'below' the level of the word, at that point which is called 'phoneme'. However, the phoneme is not actually 'something' nor does it mean 'something' - it is simply a mark of difference. This is all very interesting, someone might say, and perhaps even true, just as quantum physics and relativity theory are interesting and probably true, but what does it have to do with our actual experiences, with our actual speaking and writing? Even if we do not subscribe to a mirror-reflection-theory, we still expect from literature that it relate somehow to our experiences. It is an expectation which cannot be simply ridiculed as naive.

Phonemes, which cut and carve the differences of articulation, might be closer to our experience than it seems: they enter as radical incisions into the experience and expression of the child who turns from *infans* to a speaking organism. It has been known for some time, that children do not learn all sounds at the same time.⁷⁴ Further research has also shown that the relative sequence in the acquiring of linguistic sounds is the same for children in all languages. Some theories attempted to trace this back to the child's undeveloped physiological apparatus. But anybody who has ever listened to a little baby's utterings will have some difficulty believing such a theory. The sounds the baby is able to produce far exceed the capacities of an adult. Its physiological apparatus for producing sounds seems to be almost unlimited. However, a sharp incision takes place at the moment when the baby's sound production enters into the articulatory laws of the mother tongue, when the expressive sound becomes a differential mark. With this incision, the whole sound production is reduced to the opposition of the widest opening and complete closure: a-p/a-b. During this period, expressive sound production can still coexist with the beginning of linguistic articulations, the child might still produce the most complicated sounds. But whenever it tries to *speak*, it enters into the incisive order of articulation which for some children is so incisive that they seem to lose their voice for a while and go through a silent stage between phonetic and phonematic sound production. It is a silence that testifies to the violence of the incision which inscribes its articulatory law onto the organic body. It is the margin of this silence, this concrete incision along which the best of concrete poetry moves. It is perhaps this incision which in the psychoanalytic process is told as the (hi-)story-story of castration, narrated in the context of the patriarchal family structure.

Whatever its semantic version, the incision haunts experimental literature obsessively and violently. There is a fundamental ambivalence of almost all the experimentalists towards their organ: language either appears as the almighty organ of mediation, even creation, or as an almighty barrier, frequently as the one and the other. In this ambivalence, experimental literature has not only a deconstructive, but also a destructive element: it is the rage of the experimentalist against the organ which cuts into and forever postpones the absolute of desire. It is the rage of Oedipus who tears out his eyes, the organs of his vision *and* his blindness, the madness of Antigone who, listening to the unwritten murmurings of the

gods of the underworld, refuses any compromise with the articulated law of Zeus and Kreon and thus becomes a corpse among corpses the dissolving revelation of the absolute This is the way it happened in heroic tales and times The modern version is a photograph of the Viennese author Oswald Wiener in a dark business suit, with a hammer in his hand, standing on a pile of rubble in front of ruins marking the cover of a novel called *Die Verbesserung von Mitteleuropa (The Improvement of Middle Europe)* which, with great linguistic skills, tears to pieces its organ, its language «this ejaculation of brain shit » And at the end after the end, in an «appendix A,» it projects the orgiastic fantasy of a bioadapter which offers Antigone's funeral and the delirium of the absolute to everybody Oedipus, too, finds his modern version in a sound poem by Ernst Jandl

booooooooooooooooooooooooooooo
 rrrrrannn
 sse
 mirrr
 dda
 ppu
 pllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllll
 eaussss
 mmi
 ttirrrn
 booooooooooooooooooooooooooooo
 rrrra
 hrrrrrr
 zzznnnnnnrrrtzt''

The desarticulation of the sentence «Bohren Sie mir die Pupille aus mit Ihrem Bohrer, Herr Zahnarzt» («drill out my pupils with your borer, Mr dentist») moves the attack on the organ onomatopoetically from the semantic to the phonetic level Hans Carl Artmann's sweetly luring poetic language games are filled with dismembered bodies, corpses and streams of blood, which subvert semantically the phonetic melodies of his verses

One of Ernst Jandl's more recent collections of texts is entitled *die bearbeitung der mutze (the treatment of the cap)* and has as a motto «if the head can no longer be treated, one can still treat the cap » The marginalization of the treatment from head to cap points

metonymically to a metaphor which for centuries has marked the concept of language and rhetoric language and letter as clothing, as veils, as coats, sometimes even the body for the soul, but always external to the interiority of the spirit and the content Jandl's texts, which are unfortunately almost untranslatable, are playful masterworks on the margins of articulation, often graphically inscribing the marginal lines playing around them, blurring them, displacing them The linguistic jokes and inventive puns also blur the boundary between triumphant humor and deadly despair Where the letters play, the murmuring of death is always close

The obsession with death, dismemberment, castration, impotence and senility is strongly present in Arno Schmidt's texts which also move along the borderlines and margins of articulation But at the same time they are celebrations of life with an intensity fed by the shadow of death Arno Schmidt started in the fifties with short stories whose major unusual mark was a strange orthography Instead of following the standard rules of orthography, the texts were phonetic transcriptions of spoken language This defamiliarizing form of writing created ambiguities, displacements of meaning, and evoked subliminal counter-senses which subverted the surface meaning This remains one of the major elements of the large works of the seventies *Zettels Traum* (*Zettel's Dream*, 1970), *Die Schule der Atheisten* (*The Atheists' School*, 1972) and *Abend mit Goldrand* (*Evening Edged in Gold*, 1975) ²⁰ These texts are structured by a double principle on the one hand they manifest a highly conscious artistic and calculated order, on the other hand they are the product of chance and fortuitous phonetic associations, dreamlike and mechanical in their quality They are both manifestations of the art of writing and the art of mis-writing Often the words are literally subverted by letters under the letters Thus the word «Ländlichkeit» appears as «L-(ä, E)ndlichkeit,» which inscribes into the notion of idyllic countryside and rustic life the threat of death (Endlichkeit = finality) and sexual fantasies (Lende = loins, the biblical euphemism for the sexual organs) It is a form of writing which makes manifest what is otherwise latent in language games and communicative processes, and it insists that there is no speech act, no communication without the intervention of desire and the unconscious This unconscious, however, is not the romanticized arsenal of mythical archetypes, but rather a writing- and mis-writing-machine, ruled by the mechanics of displacement, knotting and condensation «Le monde symbolique,

c'est le monde de la machine »²¹

If the games of the letter led us perhaps too close to the underworld of the dead and entangled us too much in the knottings of desire, perhaps the grammatical rules will lead us back to reason and the enlightened world of social interaction. On the syntactic-grammatical level, the rules seem to be easier to grasp, their social dimension as regulative systems of intersubjective processes more evident. Thus Jürgen Habermas attributes to grammar the position of a transcendental horizon of communicative praxis.²² Experimentalists seem to be most interested in two aspects of grammar: on the one hand grammar as a playground for language games, on the other hand grammar as an assembly of chains and fetters, as the 'prison house of language.'

Just escaped from the underworld, we find ourselves in prison. The major thrust of German experimental literature strongly points towards an indictment of grammar as a form of domination, control, authority and coercion. It appears as the central force which internalizes external domination and violence. Internalized authority manifests itself in delirious and compulsive talking. In particular, the young Austrian author Gert Jonke has an uncanny ear for the compulsive syntax of authority.

It is on the level of the syntagmatic knottings where experimental literature in the narrow sense of the word merges with the problematization of the narrative which we sketched above. The ideological element of story telling is not just in the mode of narration, but starts already with the decision as to what can constitute story. Before even the narration starts, the concept of 'what makes a story' censors already what can be told, not only in the novel but also in the news. The general tendency in experimental literature is again to uncover such compulsive regulative implications of narration. «A good story,» Herbert Achternbusch writes, «is just a badly told story because it makes an easy connection with the brains organized by the news media.» Achternbusch destroys these badly told 'good stories' in order to allow his stories to develop their own crazy, displaced logic which disconnects the brains from their official conditioning.

Texts of this kind not only introduce new literary paradigms, they also involve the interpretative text, which can no longer remain untouched by that of which it speaks. Experimental literature displaces the significative system of the reader no less than its own. Where a text brings into play all its significative effects it leaves no

room and no escape for the aloofness of a meta-language. If classical modern literature opened up to reflective and theoretical modes of speech, postmodern 'theoretical' texts respond to it by involving their own meta-discourse in the displacing effects of language, its tropes and its figures. This makes them vulnerable, but also seductive, persuasive and strong.

NOTES

1 One of the most enthusiastic 'postmodern' critics has been Ihab Hassan, particularly in his two books *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Post Modern Literature* (New York: Oxford U.P. 1971) and *Paracriticism: Seven Speculations of the Times* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press 1975). See also M. Benamou and Ch. Charmello (eds.), *Performance in Postmodern Culture* (Madison, Wis.: Coda Press 1977). Alain Touraine, *La société postindustrielle* (Paris: Denoël 1969). Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). The journal explicitly founded to study and explore Postmodernism is *Boundary 2* (Binghamton, N.Y.).

2 Jean François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Editions de Minuit 1979).

3 Hugo Friedrich, *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1956) (4th edition 1971).

4 Hassan, *Paracriticism*, 1 c, p. 44.

5 Hassan, *Paracriticism* p. 53.

6 Hassan, *Paracriticism* p. 43.

7 The major documents of this debate are collected in H. J. Schmidt (ed.), *Expressionismusdebatte: Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970).

8 A slightly abbreviated version of this speech was published in *DIE ZEIT* no. 39 (Sept. 26 1980). I have asked Habermas for permission to publish the text in English in this issue, but unfortunately he had already promised it to Susan Sontag for a volume on Modernism.

9 This is not the only incident. When the president of the University of Hamburg suggested Walter Jens, an eminent scholar for classics, rhetoric, and equally well versed in modern literature, for a new chair for the study of rhetoric, a strong conservative group of professors successfully blocked the nomination because Jens was considered too liberal.

10 For a more detailed analysis of totalized communication see my essay «Freud,

- Habermas and the Dialectic of Enlightenment On Real and Ideal Discourses » in *New German Critique* 22 (1981), pp 41 62
- 11 *La condition postmoderne* 1 c p 98 ff
- 12 Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* p 107
- 13 Cf Manfred Durzak *Gespräche über den Roman Formbestimmung und Analysen* (Frankfurt a M Suhrkamp 1976) p 11
- 14 Christopher Caudwell *Romance and Realism A Study in English Bourgeois Literature* (Princeton Princeton U P 1970) p 97 (First published in 1937)
- 15 Kurt Batt *Die Exekution des Erzählers West Deutsche Romane zwischen 1968 und 1972* Frankfurt a M Fischer 1974
- 16 Christa Wolf «Max Frisch, beim Wiederlesen oder Vom Schreiben in Ich Form » in *Über Max Frisch II* (Frankfurt a M Suhrkamp 1976) p 12
- 17 Max Frisch *Montauk* (Frankfurt a M Suhrkamp, 1975) p 65
- 18 Roman Jakobson *Kindersprache und Aphasie* Frankfurt a M Suhrkamp 1969
- 19 Ernst Jandl *Laut und Luise*
- 20 In his review of a new English translation of *Evening Edged in Gold* S S Praver offers a short and informative introduction to Arno Schmidt S S Praver, «Etym and endgames» in *TLS* (Sept 5 1980), p 949 f
- 21 Jacques Lacan, *Le moi dans la theorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse* (Paris Seuil, 1978), p 63
- 22 Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt a M Suhrkamp, 1968), p 237

AVANT-GARDE THE CONVULSIONS OF A CONCEPT

MICHAEL T JONES
The Ohio State University

I

An eerie calm hangs over the concept of the «avant-garde » At a time when an «Avant-garde Hair Centre» (British spelling of «centre») might well be the latest addition to your neighborhood suburban shopping mall, the concept seems to survive in the general consciousness only as a distant, mocking echo of its original destructive impulse At a time when some non-representational art—Klee or Mondrian paintings—adorns calendars, that original impulse pitifully reappears in a shadowy form, only to be ridiculed by the relentless commodity mechanisms of late capitalism Those mechanisms resemble a gigantic vacuum cleaner which sucks up everything within its imperious reach, only to dump it out again into the garbage can of consummatory obsolescence a mixture of schlock, dirt, fuzz, and what used to pass for «art » What Walter Benjamin once called the «eternal return of the New» is sneeringly confirmed by the pathetically easy devouring of any subversive phenomenon whatever, by the infinitely voracious appetite of commodification and consumption Culture high, low, and indifferent has at its ready beck and call not «the burden of the past»—scholastic formulation—but rather its rich legacy of mimetic and non-mimetic, Aristotelian and Brechtian, tonal and atonal, formed and free-form possibilities for artistic creation, or at least for aesthetic convulsions And who can penetrate the labyrinthine maze of influence, not upon artistic production (difficult enough in itself) but rather upon cultural marketing, which

will supposedly determine whether today's artists will feel like emulating Balzac or Joyce, Johann Strauss or John Cage, Monet or Munch or Pollock or Andy Warhol? Who knows just how decisive the marketplace really is in contemporary artistic endeavor, must the slogan about «art as commodity» remain unfalsifiable yet unverifiable leftist paranoia?

Such questions threaten immediately to overwhelm our much more modest point of departure—the question of the current stature of the avant-garde. The frenetic pace of contemporary culture virtually precludes the possibility of genuine recurrence of «events» similar to those artistic phenomena of the early twentieth century now enshrined as the «avant-garde» or, in the terms of the most significant recent analysis, that of Peter Bürger,¹ the «historical» avant-garde. Such movements as Dada, Futurism, and most importantly Surrealism surely demonstrated their primal gesture of «épater le bourgeois,» but such a bourgeois audience for «high» culture as still remains has become accustomed to such mistreatment, having been insulted by Handke and harangued by assorted socialist Brecht epigones. They have subsidized (willingly or not) outrageously «up-to-date» renditions of virtually all the classics—from Shakespeare to Albee—that one could name. They have been subjected to the most questionable «works of art» in front of public buildings and—again, in shopping malls, the last remnant of a bourgeois public sphere, such as it is. (This habitual «épater» of course renders the National Endowment for the Arts a prime target for the new administration's budget cutters.) All these cultural phenomena and their creators frantically seek to fulfill (or perhaps even to create) authentic non-commodified needs, and this in an age when no need escapes commodification, not to speak of the status of created new ones.

Historical looks backward, hermeneutic theory has repeatedly assured and finally convinced us, are always impelled by a particular actuating force, a «cognition-guiding interest,» emanating from the present. In the case of Bürger's prototypical effort, the historical caesura can be located quite precisely—the year 1968. For when Bürger designates the intention of the historical avant-garde movements as follows: «Art should not simply be destroyed but rather transformed into life-praxis, where it would be preserved, even if in an altered form» (67), he does so from the perspective of that historical moment when it appeared that such an «aestheticization» of society might actually be possible. The moment that the

Parisian workers took to the streets was the moment that seemed to signal the concrete liberation of those aesthetic-social impulses first articulated by the historical avant-garde. From a European vantage point, the Paris May, along with the most virulent anti-authoritarian Berlin demonstrations by the German student movement, seemed for a brief moment to signal the dawn of a new era. The belief in a new beginning is not so very foreign to the American who wants to recall the events on this side of the Atlantic during that apocalyptic year. The March 31 resignation speech of Lyndon Johnson (who was simultaneously increasing the bombing) seemed to signal the triumph of the anti-war movement because of the shape of the American presidential campaign. Then in early April came King's assassination, McCarthy's continuing campaign (which had already defeated Johnson), Kennedy's triumphal entry and assassination, and then the unforgettable August in Grant Park in Chicago (the same August was also unforgettable in Prague). Seen from this perspective, the German preoccupation with 1968 is not at all aberrant, rather eminently comprehensible. Real life seemed to be overtaking the wildest possibilities of modern art virtually moment by moment.

The cultural revolution of the late 1960s appeared for a few moments to offer possibilities for emancipatory rejuvenation. Genuinely communal experiences such as Woodstock and the march on Washington were recreated in op, pop, happenings, and other such manifestations of spontaneity, in which bourgeois barriers of fragmentation and isolated contemplation were to be overcome.² But viewed from the hindsight now made available by the entire decade of the 1970s, such events, along with their instantaneous interpretation, can be clearly seen as products of a particular historical moment. A configuration of factors could be named, but chief among them would be two: general outrage at the provocation of the superfluous and criminal war, and general prosperity, which enabled students to indulge in a period of selfless social commitment. They were safe in the knowledge that despite their academic majors in such «soft» subjects as sociology, Eastern philosophy, or literature, the economy was still expanding and could yet offer them prosperous refuge. Benjamin Braddock can always return to his «plastics,» and after he marries Elaine, he probably will.

Generations of rebellious youth are, however, hardly new events in cultural history. Similar generations rebelled in Germany

around 1770, from 1819 to 1835, and in the years before 1914 (with a tragic «sublation» here) These generational upheavals mark rather clearly significant and lasting changes in cultural consciousness Hereafter, those defenders of «classical» contemporary high culture, apologists of Joyce and Kandinsky, advocates of the lasting accomplishments of modern art against the atrocities of the cultural upstarts, would be pressed into a defensive posture Nor native notions of genuine artistic creation become increasingly less convincing, they are continually being overtaken, not so much by newer art as by newer political events To the Dutschke and Cohn Bendit-led European students, the most recent heirs of this continuing cultural dialectic, the «classical» avant-garde was as distant as that «Great War» which played so large a role in it It is a grim irony of this century that the cataclysmic triumph of technological warfare, the clear victory of the «rational» in the service of the overwhelmingly irrational, should have been so soon forgotten, repressed, one is tempted to assert, or at the very least overtaken by the rush of later political events For the 1968 generation, the children of that generation which spent its childhood in the Hitler Youth, the mud of Flanders and the flame-throwers of Verdun were as remote as the Dada and Expressionist poets

Thus the avant-garde was consigned to the junk heap of cultural memory along with the classics, although at least they were not (like the classics of Weimar) enlisted for the propagation of apolitical humanism in the school system Thus the classical avant-garde in Europe became the special domain of the guardians of high culture In Hermand's usually witty formulation «The highbrows raved about Joyce, Kandinsky, and Schönberg, while the 'people' satisfied its cultural needs with pop hits, comics, and pulp novels And then suddenly around 1960, up popped a few 'barbarians' »' American «pop» art may entail ideological slipperiness (affirmative or critical of the world of Campbell's soup cans, Brillo soap pad boxes, Marilyn Monroe countenances?), but it was certainly at the very least a frontal attack on the «highbrows» and their institutions devoted to the pious worship of canonized modernity In many respects, European developments during the decade were only pale reflections of the American effort to free art from its museums and concert halls Viewed in this light, the events of 1968 were a logical conclusion to the decade's own dynamics, regardless of the immediate historical provocation of the Vietnam War From the love-and-peace messages of the flower children to

the outrageously sexual and blasphemous outpourings of shocker-pop theatricality, art was to become life. Hermand's insightful analysis of these events allows only the conclusion that these excesses were carried to the greatest imaginable extremes. Indeed they were forced to by the logic of what Hermand calls «Modcom» (for Commercial Exploitation of Modernity) «Yet because the threshold of sensibility steadily increases and consequently the sensations become ever 'bloodier,' the political provocateurs accelerate their shock effects into the realm of the madly gruesome and obscene, in order to attract any customers at all. In this manner, they end up with a kind of shocker-pop-commerce or horror-commerce, which can scarcely be distinguished from the popular entertainment industry.»¹ That is indeed the deadly dialectic, fatal to any effort to aestheticize life itself.

In Europe, such trends were more directly political in a traditional sense, but they nevertheless had their aesthetic overtones and predecessors. Karl Heinz Bohrer describes an anarchistic pamphlet distributed in 1967 at the Free University of Berlin, which called for bombing your local department store. «Surrealist cynicism terrorizes the nerves of morally aware people. The technique of satire is turned that one degree further, so that it can engender a feeling of utmost gravity. But that is precisely the literary and political attribute which was most obvious in the earliest tracts and provocations of the classical surrealists.»² 1968 was then a logical consequence. German commentators were stirred up by Leslie Fiedler's visit (in lectures that became *Cross the Border—Close the Gap*) and by the funeral celebrated for traditional «highbrow» literature by that infamous issue 15 of Enzensberger's *Kursbuch*. And as socialism with a human face began to emerge in Czechoslovakia, Parisians hit the streets. «In 1968, impatience about artistic modernism at last spilled over from the salons and feuilletons into the streets, where in Paris, that is in French, was shouted and written on the walls: first that art was shit, and second, that poetry could now be seen in the streets.»³ The sublimated uselessness of older culture was to be replaced by a utopia of sensual beauty here and now, just as the flower children had intoned.

A mystical reality cannot be lived out by masses. The filmmaker Godard, himself a noted proponent of surrealist techniques in such films as *Weekend*, once stated as his aim making films «for the children of Marx and Coca-Cola.» The phrase reveals not only his European perspective, but also the eminently *historical*

character of all these developments. This impression is strengthened if one today looks for «events» or «happenings» such as these described by Hermand. Coca-colonization has suffered its setbacks in the decade just past. No longer can the massive vulgarity of culture and daily life in late capitalist countries be so easily contrasted with a vision of plenty and of production organized properly for the benefit of all. The new realities of scarcity (in the midst of undeniable waste), which can be traced roughly to the first Arab oil embargo of 1973, foster a new selfishness, in which idealist contempt for middle-class ease («lawnorder») gives way to self-centered acquisitive survival. Existing power structures, unmasked by the provocative gestures intended to call forth repression, can hide once again behind bland assurances of concern for all. The surreal historical moment has passed, today's children are the offspring of Big Macs and Milton Friedman.

II

Herein lies the secret poignancy of Bürger's rich, suggestive inventory of avant-garde artistic techniques and their protest against earlier «organic» conceptions of genuine art. He had begun his 1971 study of French Surrealism with the words «At the latest with the events of May 1968, the relevance of Surrealism has become obvious.»⁴ And at the latest by 1973 to 1974, when the *Theory of the Avant-Garde* was conceived and written, it was obvious that the attack on the institution of art—the attempt to supersede the auratic status of art in an aestheticized life-praxis—had not only failed, but was itself the product of a particular historical moment which had passed. Bürger and other younger German intellectuals—products of that moment—undertook the project of a concretely «materialistic» literary science, which could only be achieved in the form of a theory of art in bourgeois society. His relatively brief 1974 essay then evoked a lengthy volume of *Answers*.¹⁰ Along with a 1972 essay collection entitled *Autonomy of Art*,¹⁰ these publications are exemplary for the efforts following the brief cultural revolution to continue and develop the work of their intellectual mentors who were the revolution's high priests. Indeed, brief as Bürger's book is, none of them is missing. Hegel and Marx of

course, also Marcuse and Benjamin, naturally Lukács, Adorno, and Brecht, certainly Gadamer and Habermas, even Kant and Schiller. Trenchant summary of key concepts naturally invites disputations from longer-winded colleagues. One (lengthy) contribution expands into many Bürger's few pages on Benjamin, another takes issue with his necessarily abstract notion of the transcendence of art in life-praxis, a third excoriates Bürger's foreshortened reception of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, a fourth objects to his carefully qualified distinction between the «classical» or «historical» avant-garde and a contemporary «post-avant-garde»

When one has read enough of such essays, an impression of circling scholasticism or infinite Talmudic twisting can sometimes set in. For our present purposes, the various ins and outs of the discussion are of less significance than the fact of the theoretical discussion itself. If the post-avant-garde (we shall use the term «post-modern» synonymously) does exist, it is as much in theory as in fact. That is not only the recurrent burden of *German* intellectual life, although one's stereotypical conception of much German literary criticism as being heavy on the theory and somewhat stingier with concrete analyses of works of art will not be contradicted by the volumes under discussion. (In this regard, the Germans may be pace-setters for the rest of us!) No, the retrenchment of hopeful street Surrealism into theory is rather one example of a more general current: the proliferation of theory.

This proliferation can be viewed in several ways. In the specifically German context, the apparently dominant literary trend toward the «New Inwardness» reflects both disappointment at the failure of the spontaneous movement and the recognition that a great deal of socio-political *engagement* during those heady times was the direct projection of personal neuroses. The same can be said for much of the theory then produced (quantitatively much more than later in the 1970s). It aimed at immediate street-level realization, tirelessly evoking post-bourgeois public spheres where none existed. But theory now proliferates also in France, England, and America, each emerging out of different cultural contexts and for divergent reasons, but nevertheless with similar superficial results.

This multiplication of theoretical discourse—whether structuralist or post-structuralist, marxist or deconstructionist—invokes a multiplicity of codes and consequently often engenders gross

amounts of confusion. In this regard, there is something reassuring about this German discussion, with its Hegelian—Marxist roots by now well established by their twentieth-century progeny. Against the prevailing ahistorical and even anti-historical aspects of French thought and its colorful American reception, these students of Hegel continue to insist on the *evolution* of aesthetic categories in describable historical circumstances. «Hegel historicized aesthetics,» says Bürger (118). And Hegel's most recent student must be the starting point for post-avant-garde aesthetic theory. «Adorno attempts radically to think through the historicization of art forms undertaken by Hegel, i.e. to give no historically appearing type of form-content dialectic preference over another. The avant-garde work of art appears in this view as a historically necessary expression of the alienation of late capitalist society» (120).

It is this Hegelian stress on history which sets apart the German discussion from its counterparts in neighboring countries. This becomes evident the moment one compares Bürger's approach with an older, more traditional summary such as that of Renato Poggioli. For Poggioli, avant-garde artistic movements, while admittedly responding to such historical phenomena as the development of technology, remain essentially a creative possibility of any historical epoch. There is no sense of historical necessity due to non-artistic contingencies. His phenomenology of avant-gardism envisions a continuing give and take between periods of conventionality and emerging currents antagonistic to that conventionality. Despite its concentration on events in France after 1870, therefore, it is equally applicable to such earlier movements as *Storm and Stress*. This inherently formalistic approach yields a multitude of valid insights, but it also suffers from the recurring ailment of formalistic methodology: artistic «currents» come and go, emerging from and reacting to each other in a kind of aesthetic vacuum, separate from the real world and from history.

Bürger's «critical hermeneutics» acknowledges the «present relevance» of historical research and constructs its analysis accordingly. With his point of departure the events of 1968, he can construct in retrospect a distinction not present for example in Poggioli, a distinction between earlier hermetic aestheticism (Symbolism, Impressionism) and the vitalistic energy of later avant-garde movements (Dada, Surrealism) surging out into the streets. On a much larger historical level of abstraction, Bürger returns to

the question of art in bourgeois society with an eye to its (society's) supersession. Yet he is justifiably dissatisfied with the «static opposition bourgeoisie-nobility» (51) and attempts to describe the process of art's secular liberation from its earlier cultic function in terms of several «non-simultaneous» trends. Here, Benjamin's unavoidable category of «aura» is evoked in a convincing manner. Even in its brevity, the discussion offers a persuasive outline of art's emergence from the domination of the sacred toward its eventual claim of autonomy, an outline that does indeed go further than the usual unfruitful polarity. Refinement of the historical World-Spirit is ongoing.

The atomized present, however, presents different problems for the theorist. There is the situation of philosophical aesthetics itself, which is for all practical purposes the philosophy of Adorno. For it was here that the manifold development of modern art since Baudelaire—from aestheticism and *l'art pour l'art* through the historical avant-garde to modernity's apparent extreme, Beckett, receives its historical-philosophical foundation as the necessary manifestation of late monopoly capitalism and its consequences for the individual. This art offers an accurately discordant account of the fragmented state of what remains of bourgeois individuality under such corporate, consummatory, and cultural conditions. The work of art can no longer be measured by older criteria of organic unity as in classicism or even bourgeois realism. Yet Bürger also accurately perceives the dangers of this trenchant philosophical analysis of modernity. «It seems at first as if Adorno had thereby broken through definitively all normative theory. Yet it is not difficult to recognize how the normative once again gains entry even in the course of radical historicization» (120). And if this rather exclusive view of authentic modernity tends toward the normative, how is one to confront those lesser lights who may themselves abjure classical wholeness? But even more to the point: what now?

Reinhard Baumgart has entitled an essay «What Comes After Modern Literature?» He writes: «Before our eyes, this entire modernism, from Baudelaire to Pound, from Henry James to Beckett, from Strindberg to Brecht, is beginning to sink back into tradition, to become classical.»¹² In his view, «classical» means historical, available in museums, no longer exemplary for contemporary work. With justification, he feels drawn to Thomas Mann's late refrain: «It seems to me that nothing more will come.» The essayist has no answer for his own question, his somewhat impres-

sionistic discussion of three novels which happened to appear during the epochal year 1968 can achieve no synthesis. There is no need to name the selected works here, the critic admits that they could readily be replaced by others. Indeed, that is part of the point they incorporate a kind of «throwaway» use value. Various characteristics are noted: «They take leave of the bourgeoisie as subject, narrate from the edge of society and toward utopia, and depart at the same time from bourgeois realism as a method of writing.» «The narrative is in all three novels disconnected, cut quickly like film, diverted, without any continuity, permeated by montages consisting of mere fabricated parts, hackneyed slogans, newspaper articles, parodies.» This literature «obviously no longer wants to pretend to be critique or cognition, their fictions want *by no means* to imitate realities.»¹³ The aura of the exemplary event even of great avant-garde works is now absent, replaced by immediate use in a receptive context of «diversion.» Yet simultaneously, although Baumgart does not mention it here, noteworthy works are still being produced which *could* be seen as bourgeois realism, which offer a continuous narrative (even if it can sometimes only be recovered with considerable effort), which purport to contain cognition and critique. Does the critic intend to imply that the works he chooses are the genuine «post-modern» works while these latter ones are not? And if so, would that not claim for a particular version of «post-modernism» the identically normative status that already seemed problematic in Adorno's conception of modernity?

And there still remains the question of theory. Adorno's *Philosophy of Modern Music* first appeared in 1949 after years of preparation. From which critic can we expect today a philosophy of contemporary drama to accompany that produced for «classical» modernity by Szondi? Who will bestow upon us the philosophy of post-modern narrative? The questions, which we asked at the beginning, also bother Bürger with his almost resigned conclusion of «total availability of material and of forms.» (130) The bane of a historical philosophy of art—contemporaneity of the non contemporaneous—returns with a vengeance in a post-avant-garde setting. Where anything from the past can be—almost arbitrarily—made exemplary (or parodied), then nothing is exemplary any longer. When this chaotic situation is combined with suspicion of the cultural marketplace and its opaque mechanisms, our helplessness seems total: everything seems to flood the market,

and we have no way of knowing what is being purposely excluded. In this situation, the profusion and mutual dismantling of theories seems rather to point to the impossibility of theory. Post-modernism as the impossibility of transparent conceptualization?

III

Adorno's most influential student has asked himself similar questions in his recent speech accepting the Adorno prize. But Jürgen Habermas formulates the questions somewhat differently. He does not ask whether post-modernism can be conceptualized, but rather asks to what degree it must be regarded as anti-modern. If Bürger is correct that «classical modernism» sought the transcendence of art in life itself, then the most recent failure of that effort would logically bring with it for Bürger and friends a period of stock-taking and historical theorizing. But the problem is that «modernism» covers a multitude of sins, including not only the impulse toward this transcendence, but also the elitist gesture of sovereign withdrawal into hermetic aestheticism. Does the recent defeat of the former leave only the latter? Or will it not rather lead to wholesale rejection of even that «classical modernism» now only conserved in museums and seminar rooms?

Habermas criticizes the short-sightedness of Surrealism's attempted transcendence of art into life. At the same time, he is concerned to defend the cultural sphere from the intemperate attacks of those remarkable creatures, the neoconservatives (for America, he mentions Daniel Bell). «Neoconservatism namely transfers the unpleasant consequences of a more or less successful capitalist modernization from economy and society onto cultural modernism.»¹⁴ Thus the danger encountered by a theory of post-modernism which rejects the accomplishments of the historical avant-garde as mere bourgeois sublimation is the old danger of false friends. If it promotes—as Fiedler did in his original provocative remarks of 1968¹⁵—a literary production consisting of science-fiction, pornography, or Indian stories in its effort to overcome artificial barriers between «highbrows» and the «people,» it stands to lose—reasons Habermas—precisely those characteristics that render it valuable: its continuing testimony regarding the

debilitating effects of the existing economic system on real human beings

Nevertheless, Habermas' conclusion must give pause. His prime concern is clearly to combat those neoconservatives, who «greet the development of modern science, insofar as it goes beyond its own sphere only in order to promote technical progress, capitalist growth, and rational administration. Otherwise, they recommend a policy of defusion of the explosive content of cultural modernism.» The question is one of retaining this explosive content, but one wonders whether the final evocation of the mentor for whom the prize was named is the most felicitous means for rescuing the gesture of refusal and critique. If Adorno's conception of modernism was narrow and tended to become normative, a post-modern critique that rejects such normativism need not also reject these subversive content. Philosophical aesthetics cannot fall back even upon its most «progressive» historical position. Adorno himself reflected on the «obsolete» nature of his enterprise in the *Aesthetic Theory*.

So no immediately synthesizing facet is available. After the most recent hopes for a transcendence of art into life were dashed, such hopes seem only utopian in the negative sense of obscurantist. The limits of the exploitation of nature («enough *could* be produced for all, if one could only alter the structures of domination») —that dynamic thesis of Frankfurt thought, seems relativized by the recent experience of scarcity, although one could imagine that if production for profit were halted and production for genuine (not created) needs instituted, scarcity might well become more scarce. So much for the economic sphere, which, confused as it is, seems virtually transparent in comparison to the cultural. If the total availability of all forms and aesthetic strategies —as Bürger contends— is indeed an accurate account of the current situation, then it is difficult to formulate general statements about it.

A theory of the post-avant-garde must above all —this is Habermas' prime concern—beware of applause from the wrong side. It must continue to insist on the ongoing emancipatory potential of that classical avant-garde which it is simultaneously attempting to—continue? overcome? For it must never forget that the avant-garde directed its attack chiefly at art itself, but with the goal of art's sublation, not its destruction. Faced now with constant and increasing danger of commodification no matter what one does, art

and its creators are once more cast adrift from any solid moorings. The profusion of theory—in the guise of mutually incomprehensible theories—can only constitute a transitory repose. The true enemy, neoconservatism, must not derive comfort from a theory of post-modernism so narrow that it eventually eliminates any possible critique or subversion that does not measure up to preconceived aesthetic standards. But that means that the colorful chaos of current artistic production continues to elude conceptual synthesis. That dialectic of concept and chaos defines our situation, but when was it not so?

NOTES

1 Peter Bürger *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt Suhrkamp, 1974). Page references in the text are to this volume. All translations from the German are my own.

2 Jost Hermand *Pop International Eine kritische Analyse* (Frankfurt Athenäum 1971).

3 Hermand *Pop* p 11

4 Hermand *Pop* p 88

5 Hermand, *Pop* p 117

6 Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Die gefährdete Phantasie oder Surrealismus und Terror* (Munich Hanser 1970) p 37

7 Reinhard Baumgart, *Die verdrängte Phantasie 20 Essays über Kunst und Gesellschaft* (Darmstadt and Neuwied Luchterhands 1973) pp 162 163

8 Peter Bürger, *Der französische Surrealismus Studien zum Problem der avantgardistischen Literatur* (Frankfurt Suhrkamp, 1971), p 7

9 *Theorie der Avantgarde Antworten auf Peter Bürgers Bestimmung von Kunst und bürgerlicher Gesellschaft* ed W. Martin Lüdke (Frankfurt Suhrkamp 1976)

10 Michael Müller et al., *Autonomie der Kunst Zur Genese und Kritik einer bürgerlichen Kategorie* (Frankfurt Suhrkamp, 1972)

11 Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant Garde* trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (New York Harper and Row 1968)

12 Baumgart *Phantasie* p 145

13 Baumgart, *Phantasie* pp 148 149

14 Jürgen Habermas, «Die Moderne—ein unvollendetes Projekt,» in *Die Zeit*

(North American Edition), September 26, 1980, pp 17 18

15 Cf Baumgart «Die Enkel von Thomas Proust und Marcel Mann Zehn
Anmerkungen zu Thesen von Leslie Fiedler » in *Phantasie* pp 130 ff

THE GENDER OF AUTHORSHIP

HEINER MULLER AND CHRISTA WOLF

HELEN FEHERVARY
The Ohio State University

I

The relationship between sexuality and politics has always been an underlying assumption of the literary avant-garde. Within East German literature, which rests on the notion of a fairly comprehensive social theory and rises out of a relatively homogeneous cultural sphere, this relationship takes on a distinct form which is different from its counterparts in the West, but which in its paradigmatic quality can nevertheless shed light on contemporary discussions of this subject in general. The relationship between sexuality and politics manifests itself within the creative literary process as an interdependence between authorship and gender. In East German literature the question of authorship is inherently linked to the notion of art as a form of societal production and the identity of the artist as a producer. Given the rootedness of East German culture in the Marxist concept of life as production and the human being as an ensemble of production relationships, the question of the author as producer is no longer a matter of controversy but accepted fact. As formulated by Walter Benjamin and demonstrated by the theater of Brecht, revolutionary art manifests itself not in its representational quality but in its functionality, not in how it characterizes the production relationships of a given time but in what function it assumes within those relationships.¹

In the thirty years since the founding of the GDR, East German literature has witnessed the transition from an early phase of revolutionary socialism to the gradual establishment of a technocratic state socialism. In this context avant-garde writing in the GDR no longer critiques primarily the traditional impediments to socialism, such as remnants of capitalism, bourgeois individualism, etc., but rather those aspects of the revolutionary

tradition itself which have contributed to the solidification of state socialism the heritage of instrumental rationality, patriarchy, and the totalitarianism of Enlightenment discourse As a result, the notion of the author as producer is no longer linked to the revolutionary project of the operative writer, but has become associated with technological rationality, domination and the authoritarian state Narrative omniscience no longer represents the radical cunning of the masses as it did for Brecht, but suggests rather the logistics of elitism and the discourses of power The problem of the operative writer is no longer how effectively he can proselytize, but to what extent his instrumental productivism reinforces the power relationships of the society in which he lives Authorial sovereignty and perfection ultimately betray the society and the self «With the elimination of private ownership of property and the private ownership of the self within socialism, wisdom becomes narrow minded, aphorisms become reactionary, the pose of the classical author requires Homeric blindness The collision of historical epochs strikes deeply, and painfully, into the individual who still is an author but can no longer be one »¹ Today in the GDR the radical writer is imperfect, vulnerable and often at a loss The primary concern of this writer is no longer the teleology of a better future, but the deformations and hopes of the past repressed by the historical machine that has cemented the present

For the contemporary East German avant-garde the metaphor of sexuality expresses most fundamentally the yearning for a repressed past As Max Horkheimer and Theodor W Adorno pointed out in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the sexuality represented by the Sirens is the ultimate threat to Odysseus' mastery over nature and his return home into the stability of institutions and civilization Not coincidentally, the Odyssean figure has been one of the most frequent characters in East German drama and literature Odysseus is the prototypical Leninist functionary, the cunning pragmatist who in the name of enlightened progress turns everything that threatens his goal into the Other «The Sirens have their own quality,» write Horkheimer and Adorno, «but in primitive bourgeois history it is neutralized to become merely the wistful longing of the passer-by »¹ Odysseus acts out the ideology of the survivor, his price is the rationalization of life and the repression of the self While others act, his weapon is the dialectics of reason and language In East German literature he suggests the Party secretary, the technocratic ideologue, and the operative

author as producer himself. Finally, Odysseus is the enlightened patriarch who seeks to territorialize all areas that encroach upon the boundaries of his logocentric voyage into the future called historical revolution.

The field of sexuality is one of the last open spaces that defies the universalizing ambitions of classical Marxist theory and the Prussian heritage of obedience to authority which is specific to East German culture. Small wonder that sexuality has become a main theme of East German drama, poetry and prose in recent years. One of the most significant theatrical events of the 1970s, for example, was a production of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* which was based on improvisation rather than theory and, instead of language and plot, was guided by the physicalization of concepts and the tensions of sexuality itself. 'The literature of young writers that circulates in samizdat form is filled with sexual fantasies and all kinds of so-called polymorphous perversions. There is even an anthology of short stories by some of East Germany's best-known writers devoted entirely to the subject of sex changes.' Most recently, in his play *Sappa* the dramatist Stefan Schutz transfers his sexual identity as author to female experience, the play concerns a Lysistrata-like rebellion of a group of women who abort their fetuses rather than reproducing life for the technocratic advancement of the state. 'The concern with sexuality in East German literature is fundamentally political, and calls into question the social hegemony of patriarchal authority and the specifically male-identified character of Marxist-Leninist history. With respect to the process of writing, the relationship between sexuality and politics has necessarily called forth a reflection upon the gender of authorship as well.'

II

This reflection upon the gender of authorship is represented most paradigmatically by the writers Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf. When viewed as Marxist writers and from a sex-neutral perspective, the aesthetic, philosophical and political developments of these two writers are strikingly similar. Both were born in 1929, for both fascism was the formative experience of their childhood years. After the War they became communists, settled in East Ger-

many, and committed their work to the building of socialism in that country. Both began working as journalists and started producing their literary works in the late 1950s. Characteristically, the male author Müller took up the more public, abstract and globally oriented form of drama and theater, while Christa Wolf devoted herself to the more private, descriptive and personalized forms of the novel and short prose. Today both Wolf and Müller stand at the experimental forefront of their respective genres and have attained an international stature that no other East German writers enjoy. Both have a large following of younger writers in both East and West. What the novelist Anna Seghers and the playwright Bertolt Brecht meant to the development of a radical socialist aesthetic in the Germany of their time is represented by Wolf and Müller in the GDR today.⁷

The political landscape of their society and its philosophical tradition of Marxism have guided the development of both writers. They represent the generation whose literature matured in dialectical relationship to the development of socialism in the GDR. Consistent with the political and economic reality of the early reconstruction years in the GDR, Müller's and Wolf's early works centered on the themes of agricultural and industrial production. With the gradual liberalization and popularization of culture in the 1960s, both writers turned to a reflection upon the authenticity of individual experience within socialism. Not coincidentally, Wolf's texts were consciously peopled by women, Müller's by men. Müller drew upon Brecht's theory of the learning play that relinquishes didacticism and allows characters to play out and expand the possibilities of a given situation. Wolf wrote *The Quest for Christa T* (1968), a novel in the tradition of modernist stream-of-consciousness in which a narrator who has accommodated herself to the social system searches for the enigmatic female alter-ego that she has repressed. With the transition to state socialism in the early 1970s and the experience of Prague in 1968 behind them, both Wolf and Müller became increasingly critical of the state. Müller's *Cement* (1972), a play about the transition from Leninism to a bureaucratic and technocratic socialism in early Soviet Russia, was the author's farewell to the productivist ideology of Marxist-Leninist revolution and the rationalistic heritage of the Enlightenment. Similarly, Wolf's prose centered on the institutionalization of life in the GDR and the internalization of dominant power structures within the individual. Her prose collection during this time

was appropriately entitled *Unter den Linden* (1974), the name of East Berlin's parade street of institutionalized government and high culture. In the mid-70s both Wolf and Müller took up the theme of German history to point up the links between authoritarian forms of socialization in the GDR and its Prussian and fascist past. Müller's plays *Germania*, (1971) *The Slaughter* (1974), *Life of Gundling* (1975), and Wolf's novel *Patterns of Childhood* (1976) delineate the psychological and social forms of «everyday fascism» which are not eliminated by the economic transition to socialism. In the course of time, both Wolf's and Müller's writing became increasingly autobiographical. Most recently, their works have directly addressed the radical dimensions of sexuality and the politics of gender.

The thematic framework of Wolf's and Müller's literary development is by no means untypical of a general trend of avant-garde writing in the GDR. What distinguishes their work in particular, however, is that their critique of the dominant tradition of their culture has been consistently accompanied by a reflection upon their own participation as narrative authorities within this tradition. «I/GDR cannot write about myself without writing about GDR/politics,» said Heiner Müller recently. And conversely «It is no longer permissible not to talk about oneself when one writes.»⁸ A similar conviction holds true for Christa Wolf who repeatedly emphasizes the need for the honesty of the writer and the authenticity of authorship.⁹ As communist writers, Müller and Wolf exhibit a remarkably similar literary development. As two writers of opposite sex, the aesthetic questions surrounding their work take on an entirely new quality.

III

The male author Müller has become increasingly aware that the quality of his writing and his success as an author are fundamentally connected to male-defined values of literary history and production. Within patriarchy, male authorship is inherently based on privilege. The metaphors, myths and topoi of the literary tradition which the author employs are rooted in a dominant male culture and aesthetic. In this sense, an unreflected male authorship

is by its very nature an exercise of authority and power Müller's response to this realization has been the aesthetics of deconstruction, an attempt to erode the dominant structures of the literary text in order to find the authentic subject which male history has repressed. The emergence of this subject is ultimately prohibited by the omniscience of male authorship itself. For this reason Müller sees the elimination of the author, that is, the classical male author, as the hope of literature and the future. In a recent essay on post-modernism he writes «As long as freedom is based on violence and the practice of art on privileges, works of art will tend to be prisons, the great works, accomplices of power. The outstanding literary products of this century work toward the liquidation of their autonomy, toward the expropriation and finally the disappearance of the author. Rimbaud and his escape to Africa. Lautréamont, the anonymous catastrophe. Kafka, who wrote to burn his works because he did not want to keep his soul as Marlowe's Faust did. Literature participates in the movement of language first evident in common language and not on paper. In this sense literature is an affair of the people, and the illiterates are the hope of literature. Work toward the disappearance of the author is resistance against the disappearance of humankind »¹⁰

In the GDR, which is a highly developed industrial nation and not part of the Third World, the possibilities of common language and so-called illiteracy are most effectively represented by women. Like Müller, and in a similar effort to erode the dominant structures of the literary text and its tradition, Christa Wolf has turned increasingly to an aesthetic of deconstruction. Indeed, a main theme of Wolf's work has been her rootedness as author in the male tradition of literature and, as a female author, her difficulty in «saying I,» as she terms it.¹¹ The «I» of male authorship is the history of the literary canon: the world of Homer, the Greeks, Shakespeare, Goethe, Tolstoy, and the contemporary avant-garde writer who, since Joyce, has found innumerable methods of pondering why he no longer exists. This canon is the landscape of war, the revolution, the return home, the conflict between the individual and the state, the stormy and stressful escape into nature, the laborious journey into the lonely psyche, the glory and the meaninglessness of death. Indeed, what woman writer or reader recognizes herself in the idealism, melancholy and insanity of an Orestes or Hamlet, in the political power complex of a Macbeth or Richard III, in the destructive obsession with knowledge of an

Oedipus or Faust, in the poetic solipsism of Tasso or Malte Laurids Brigge, or in the global vision of the tragic revolutionary from Prometheus to Danton? The historical «I» of female authorship lies in what has been concealed by the literary canon, in the silent tradition of oral history, letters, diaries, autobiography, and fiction that has never been written down, let alone published. The «I» of female authorship ultimately calls for the creation of authorship, not its deconstruction. As Virginia Woolf has said, it creates itself out of the memory of Shakespeare's sister who never existed, but who will emerge when the drama of Shakespeare has run its course.¹² The ultimate consequence of Christa Wolf's aesthetic of deconstruction is the freeing of textual space for the creation of something new, a break with the patrilinear tradition of the fathers in order to unravel the hidden threads of female authorship. Whereas Heiner Müller, from the perspective of dominant male culture, speaks of this process in terms of an opposition between the literary exercise of power and illiteracy, for Christa Wolf this process involves the insistence on a literary voice which heretofore has seemed to be silent, but in fact has simply not been heard. This difference in perspective can best be explicated by a comparison of these two writers' most recent works: Müller's play *Hamletmachine* (1977) and Wolf's short novel *No Place Nowhere* (1979).¹³

The titles of these two texts already suggest the gender specificity of their respective authors. Müller's «Hamletmachine» assumes the existence of a literary canon, of history, the world of Shakespeare, classical drama, a global frame of literary reference. H M Hamletmachine is also an anagram for H M Heiner Müller: the contemporary male author is the natural heir to all the myths, metaphors and topoi of the literary tradition. In contrast, the identity of the female author Wolf is indicated by absence: «No Place Nowhere». Her natural heritage is the concealment of a literary tradition, not the overbearing presence of the literary machine suggested by Müller's play. At the same time *No Place Nowhere* is a code for utopia. Whereas Müller's title «Hamletmachine» evidences the imprisonment of the male author within the closed system of the literary heritage and the text, Wolf's title «No Place Nowhere» signals the infinite possibilities of redefining the past and creating the future.

IV

Let us look at Müller's play first. In the tradition of classical drama, it consists of five parts, each of them variations on the theme of Shakespeare's original play. Hamlet is the hero, the author, the human subject, the literary «I». He is an inherited identity, an all too familiar metaphor, a classical monument. Müller's Hamlet poses as the image of himself: «I was Hamlet. I stood on the coast and talked to the surf. BLABLA, the ruins of Europe in my back. I'm good Hamlet. Give me a cause for grief. Ah the whole globe for a real sorrow. Richard the Third. I the princekilling king. Oh my people what have I done unto thee. I drag around my heavy brain like a hump. Second clown in the communist spring. Something is rotten in this age of hope. Let's delve in earth and blow her at the moon.»¹⁴ The drama of Müller's Hamlet exists in his quotations of himself. Indeed, the play is made up not only of quotations and paraphrases from Shakespeare's original, but of numerous lies from Müller's earlier plays as well. Like his male character, the author has nothing more to say and resorts to quoting literary history and himself. BLABLA. In a desperate effort to avoid the entropy of silence he forces the dialogue with Shakespeare and manages to complete the play: five acts as scenes, in classical form. It is an old trick and the author shows it. The hybrid of male authorship constructs a competitive dialogue between the writer and his most brilliant, hence most oppressive forefather. Ultimately, this is not dialogue but monologue: the static machinery of Hamlet, H M, Heiner Müller, Hamlet machine. They are all the same.

Who is Hamlet? Hamlet represents the paradigmatic situation of the male dramatic hero. Like Orestes in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* he returns home to find disorder in the house and his patrilinear inheritance threatened. He is obsessed with the ghost of his father, the betrayal of his mother, and he vacillates between the affections of his sister/lover and his friend. His ambition is to save Denmark, his emotional engagement is with himself. The drama of Hamlet is a monologue with the self. For five acts he cannot act. The tragedy of Hamlet is his self-involvement, it produces a stage full of corpses at the end of the play. The melancholy and idealizing ambitions of the male hero turn ultimately into violence. For the playwright Müller, Hamlet is the paradigm of the radical intellectual for whom

the revolution always ends with the appearance of Fortinbras, with Napoleon, with Stalin. The play suggests that Hamlet is not only a victim of but also an accomplice in this process.

Müller's entire play concerns itself with the author's effort to find a way out of being, acting out, rewriting the paradigm of Hamlet. His effort fails. Hamlet is not only the past but the present as well. Hamlet's inability to change makes him a machine. «I am the soldier in the tank turret, my head is empty under the helmet, the stifled scream under the chains. I am the typewriter. I am my own prisoner. I feed the computer with my data. My roles are spit and spitoon knife and wound tooth and gullet neck and noose. I am the data bank. Bleeding in the crowd. My drama has not taken place. The text got lost. The actors have hung up their faces on the nail in the dressing room. The souffleur is rotting in his box. The stuffed corpses in the audience don't move a finger. I go home and kill time, at one with my divided self.»¹⁵ At the end Hamlet, in full armor, takes an axe and splits open the heads of Marx, Lenin and Mao. The original Hamlet had never acted and failed because he was obsessed with the ghost of his father. Müller's Hamlet survives by destroying the ghosts of his political fathers, and the inspirational ghost of Shakespeare as well. But he survives as a machine, without a past and a future, a machine that is at once self-perpetuating and self-annihilating. The author as technocrat, the text as the machine.

Hamlet passes. The author passes. What remains? Ophelia, of course. The revolutionary project that fails and ends with the Hamletmachine is transferred to the Other, the woman. In Müller's play Ophelia no longer turns violence against herself but sets into motion the task relinquished by Hamlet. At the end of the play Ophelia in bondage sits in the water underworld in a wheelchair. «Electra speaking. In the name of the sacrifices. I expel all the semen which I have received. I transform the milk of my breasts into deadly poison. I strangle the world which I have born between my thighs. Down with the joy of subjection. Long live hate, spite, the revolution, death. When she comes through your bedrooms with butcher's knives you'll know the truth.»¹⁶ Ophelia as Electra, as the Ulrike Meinhof who survived, or as the insane terrorism of Susan Atkins and the Charles Manson clan. Ophelia as the brutal possibility of illiteracy and female authorship. Ophelia with the knife as the tortured vision of the future, so that Hamlet can finally put down his pen and exit. The ultimate cynicism of Müller's play is

that Ophelia is not autonomous but a conscious projection of the Hamletmachine—as she was the unconscious projection of Hamlet in Shakespeare's original play. For Müller, Ophelia is no longer second nature created out of Adam's rib: she is a perfect system produced and manipulated by the rationalization of the authorial machine. In her most extreme form she is the machine gone wild, which no longer needs the author who produced her and turns against him. Ophelia is as much a product of the author's fear as she is of his hope. That is why he refuses to give her up and continues systematically to colonize and to reproduce her. Hamlet still insists on telling Ophelia where she's supposed to go.

Is then Ophelia a woman or a man? For Müller, the probing of a separate gender specificity leads to an obfuscation of these categories. In the fourth scene of the play the player of Hamlet says «My place, if my drama were still to take place, would be on both sides of the front, between the fronts, above them»¹⁷. The transsexual dimensions of such a boundary situation are underscored and contrasted in the preceding scene by the impasses of sexual transference and the freezing of sexual identity in images. Ophelia enters, painted and dressed like a whore: «Do you want to eat my heart, Hamlet?» Hamlet covers his face with his hands and says «I want to be a woman». Hamlet puts on Ophelia's clothes, she creates a whore's mask for him. Hamlet poses as a whore.¹⁸ Later, Hamlet says «I want to be a machine»¹⁹. From this point of view, the difference at the end of the play between Hamlet posing in his armor (Hamletmachine) and Ophelia speaking out of the bondage of her wheelchair (female Other) might be seen less as the opposition between male and female than as two forms of transvestitism, as the «masculine» and «feminine» sides of the former «I» who was the character/narrator/author/Hamlet/H.M. The relationship Hamlet/Ophelia strives for a transsexual identity, but rests ultimately in a mutually exclusive confrontation of gender clichés and in transference. Hamlet/Ophelia only perceive themselves or their (Hamlet's) images of each other. For Hamlet, Ophelia is always an object of narcissistic desire, and the reverse. That is why they remain frozen in a never-ending series of oppositions and dualities. That is why the play is so appropriately entitled *Hamletmachine*: an intricate construct that distinguishes all experience according to the one quantification of Being called Hamlet.

The art of Hamlet is also the end point of creativity. Hamlet's

narrative voice reiterates the dilemma of the male artist which Müller has described in a separate essay as Orpheus «Orpheus the singer was a man who could not wait. He had lost his wife by sleeping with her too soon after she gave birth to a child, or by giving her a forbidden glance too soon during their return from the underworld after his song had liberated her from death. Thus she was turned back into dust before becoming flesh anew, whereupon Orpheus invented pederasty which excludes childbirth and is closer to death than is the love for women. Those he scorned hunted him with the weapons of their bodies, branches and stones. But the song protects the singer: what he had praised with his song could not scratch his skin. Farmers, scared by the noise of the hunt, ran away from their plows for which there had been no place in his song. So his place was under the plows.»²⁰

In Christa Wolf's short novel *No Place Nowhere*, the paradigm of Hamlet and Ophelia is written from the point of view of the woman. Like Heiner Müller, Christa Wolf draws upon the topoi of the literary tradition in order to articulate her relationship to authorship and to the text. Unlike Müller who reaches back to the classics, Wolf takes as her literary metaphors the victims of classicism, «the avant-garde without a hinterland,» as she calls them,²¹ those who write in spite of the awareness that «they are not needed,»²² indeed because of it. This is the radicalism of the concealed literary tradition: it is by its very nature vulnerable, and persistently calls into question the self-perpetuation of the literary machine. In spite of his tendency toward self-destruction, Hamlet and his author Shakespeare have thrived over the centuries. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Virginia Woolf has suggested why

The mind of an artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent, like Shakespeare's mind. There must be no obstacle in it, no foreign matter unconsumed. For though we say that we know nothing about Shakespeare's state of mind, even as we say that, we are saying something about Shakespeare's state of mind. The reason perhaps why we know so little of Shakespeare is that his grudges and spites and antipathies are hidden from us. We are not held up by some 'revelation' which reminds us of the writer. All desire to protest, to preach, to proclaim an injury, to pay off a score, to make the world the witness of some hardship or grievance

was fired out of him and consumed Therefore his poetry flows from him free and unimpeded If ever a human being got his work expressed completely, it was Shakespeare If ever a mind was incandescent, unimpeded, I thought, turning again to the bookcase, it was Shakespeare's mind ²³

Shakespeare is the male paradigm of literary sovereignty and self assurance For the Shakespearean writer the time is always ripe for literature That is why he can write the tragedy of Hamlet without succumbing himself Writing as survival, as the transcendence and objectification of human experience Writing as putting one's crises behind oneself Writing as safety in the abstraction of the literary machine Writing as imprisonment

This is the opposite of finding oneself while writing, of allowing oneself to create a literary existence which the traditional literary world cannot conceive of and hence does not need The main characters in Christa Wolf's *No Place Nowhere* are two such writers Karoline von Günderrode and Heinrich von Kleist Both of them are historical personages Both of them wrote in Germany during the time following the French Revolution, both of them were unrecognized during their lifetimes, both of them committed suicide at an early age Günderrode in 1806 at the age of 26, Kleist in 1811 at the age of 34 Both of them lived out an existence which Shakespeare avoided through his ability to formulate Hamlet the inability to systematize, to maintain the boundaries of the self, to act according to the prevailing codes This is the tradition of literary marginality which Christa Wolf asserts as her own

In her novel, Wolf fictionalizes a meeting between Kleist and Günderrode which never actually took place The dialogue between two isolated writers, one male, one female, is the fictional utopia of «No Place Nowhere» Within the patriarchal code of literature, the mode of narration has assumed that maleness is the one quantifiable category of Being and Seeing and that femaleness is its very opposite an enigmatic Other For the female writer Christa Wolf, this assumption is by its very nature invalid Rather than working within such a system of quantification, either by reiterating it or turning it around, Wolf creates a mode of narration that expands the perspectives of gender and the possibilities of individual experience In his meeting with Günderrode, Kleist becomes more

boundaries of these two writers' separate self-identification ends. Like Müller's play, Wolf's novel demonstrates the impasse of a holistic gender-identified optic. Where Müller attempts a new optic based on gender oppositions and transference which manifests itself in the confrontation of images, Wolf attempts a reintegration of sameness and difference within the narrative process itself. The difference between the new male optic, which sees oppositions and images, and the new female optic, which integrates in the very process of seeing, suggests the genre difference between two creative modes. The playwright Müller represents the world in the complex of images called theater, the prose author Wolf writes a world which no longer distinguishes between what is and how it is seen. Christa Wolf writes in a precise, increasingly complex narrative style which articulates the intersections of gender identification as subtly as it radically transforms them. Her prose creates the sexuality of an authorial perspective rather than abstractly representing its dramatic contradictions. Wolf writes out of a process of growth, not conflict and change. Her authorial identity is not «on both sides of the front, between the fronts, above them». She does not see a system of fronts, she is always the boundary itself, the boundary which shifts and expands as soon as it experiences its own limitations. The authorial identity of Christa Wolf does not abstract and distinguish relationships, she is/creates the form of the relationship itself. The difference between Heiner Müller's theater and Christa Wolf's prose world perhaps suggests a divergence of male and female modes within contemporary authorship in general.

The relationship between Kleist and Günderröde is based on familiarity, not estrangement. Heinrich von Kleist is the epitome of the young poetic idealist who, after reading Kant and his critique of reason, has no place to go. The ground has moved out from under Kleist's feet, he sees himself as a «monster,» a «shipwrecked genius.»²⁴ The stability of the fathers has vanished. Kleist is reduced to himself and to articulating the experience of a distorted nature. He is himself this distorted nature. This is why he says that his head operates like a machine,²⁵ or that his plan for his next drama is an «absurd geometric construction, a crazy mechanism.»²⁶ Like Hamlet, Kleist is driven by the ghost of his literary forefather which persistently haunts him. Similarly, Kleist is unable to separate himself from the past, to make a choice between conforming or destroying, or to distinguish between separate

categories as such «Goethe doesn't have a compulsive tendency toward tragedy He takes care that there is harmony I cannot divide the world into good and bad, into two branches of reason, into healthy and sick If I wanted to divide the world I would have to take the axe to myself, split my inner self, and present the two halves to the disgusted audience »²⁷

Kleist is a forerunner of the literary avant-garde He is the memory of Hamlet, whose desperation turned into the self-destruction of the Hamletmachine Christa Wolf draws her character out of love, not cynicism, out of a knowledge of limitations, and out of the conviction that Kleist is not less but more The character of Kleist expands in the process of being perceived by his interlocutor, Günderrode Günderrode and Kleist are the two radical possibilities of the literary tradition which Christa Wolf has inherited and which have guided her work Kleist, the male writer whose experience of a distorted nature leads him to abstract himself and his life in art, Günderrode, the female writer whose experience as a woman of being second nature leads her to create a new world of codes in her art Kleist and Günderrode suggest two forms of experience which the patriarchal world is unable to assimilate and therefore rejects

Both Günderrode and Kleist wrote against the grain of classicism, a system which assumes totality and perfection and hence imposes hierarchies, expectations and rules In this context writing against the grain also produces desperation, fear, and the urge for accommodation to what one is unable and unwilling to do Writing against the grain is that unnatural landscape of «No Place Nowhere,» which causes Kleist to see himself alternately as a monster and a shipwrecked genius, and allows Günderrode to vacillate between her visions of poetic grandeur and her fear and disbelief in her creative talent Like Kleist, Günderrode lives on the edge of the world order, an experience which both distorts and expands the self In a letter she wrote «Often I have had the unfeminine desire to throw myself into the wild fray of battle, to die—why wasn't I a man! I have no sense for feminine virtues, for the pleasures of women I only like what is wild, great and brilliant There is an unfortunate, but incorrigible disproportion in my soul, and it has to stay that way because I am a woman and have the desires of a man, without the strength of a man That is why I vacillate so much and am so at odds with myself »²⁸

Günderrode is not wholly a woman Kleist is not wholly a

man Or, both of them are more This is also the experience of «No Place Nowhere » The torn and tenacious poet G nderrode admires the sovereignty of her friend Bettine von Arnim, who haunts the pages of the novel Bettine's creativity arises out of a «spirit of unimportance»²⁹ and breaks through the artificial constraints of literary ambition and convention G nderrode knows «how necessary Bettine is for her, so that she can dispel again and again in herself that hidden feeling of superiority which has always separated her from others »³⁰ «How light and natural things are, how much closer she is to people, when she does not want to be important »³¹ Likewise, Kleist respects and secretly fears his sister Ulrike who dresses in men's clothing and has the courage to be that he lacks «Yet he avoids and will continue to avoid probing more deeply into the courage, indeed the arrogance, which his sister has often demonstrated »³² For both G nderrode and Kleist, this is «life that cannot be lived»,³³ it exists on the boundary between experience and fiction This realization brings them closer to themselves and to each other Where wholeness of identification disappears, the possibility of intersubjectivity becomes clearer «Do you believe, G nderrode, that every person has an unspeakable secret? Yes, says G nderrode In these times? Yes »³⁴ The narrative voice no longer distinguishes between Kleist and G nderrode «You know it, I know it too Don't come too near Don't stay too far Hide Reveal yourself Forget what you know Keep it Masks come off, crusts, scabs, polish The raw skin Undrawn features My face, that would be it This yours Essentially different In essence similar Woman Man Needless words We, each one of us imprisoned in our sex The touch that we demand so endlessly, it doesn't exist It was disembodied with us We would have to invent it It presents itself to us in our dreams, distorted, terrible, a grimace The fear at dawn, after the early awakening We remain unknown to each other, unapproachable, addicted to disguises Strange names which we assume The cry pushed back into our throat Mourning is not allowed, for where are the losses I am not I You are not you Who is we?»³⁵

The meeting between Kleist and G nderrode takes place along the river Rhine, a landscape of flux which obscures the boundaries of the restricted self and allows for the creation of an androgynous identity, not as dissolution but as possibility, not as an end but as a beginning «To comprehend that we are a sketch for the future—to be discarded perhaps, perhaps to be taken up again, we have no in-

fluence on that To laugh about that is human Sketching as a sketch Delegated to a project which remains open, open like a wound »³⁶

The androgynous identity transforms the representation of the world in images into a landscape of nature called «No Place Nowhere » The androgynous identity is ultimately G nderrode's creation, not Kleist's She, the woman, is only once removed from the narrative voice, Kleist, both the inherited and yearned for alter-ego, is always twice removed G nderrode «At this time of day she often wishes to be alone and to be dead except for the one whom she does not yet know and whom she will create for herself She tears herself apart into three people, one of them a man Love, when it is unconditional, can fuse the three separate people The man next to her does not have this possibility His work is the only point at which he can become one with himself, he may not give it up for one person As such, he is twice as lonely, twice as unfree It cannot go well for this person, be he a genius or one unfortunate individual among many, as they are spit out by time »³⁷

The male writer creates his work, the female writer creates a possibility of life This is what ultimately distinguishes Kleist and G nderrode In a separate essay Wolf has written about G nderrode «She enters a system of codes derived from the notion of masculine Opus and Genius and which demands from her what she cannot achieve to separate her work from her person, to create art at the expense of life, to cultivate the distance and indifference in oneself which produces The Opus, but kills the direct relationship to other people because it makes them into objects »³⁸ G nderrode's aesthetic project transforms itself into a project of life Indeed, for much of the novel she listens and observes, while Kleist talks and represents himself, she creates and experiences their relationship, he formulates his art G nderrode's poetic disability is also her creative strength While Kleist articulates the concept of his next drama, she creates a vision of the world, a vision that is «open like a wound» because it is hers and at the same time opens itself to others

In describing the sameness and differentness between the male writer Kleist and the female writer G nderrode, the narrative voice of Christa Wolf creates an obfuscation of these two separate categories which is assimilated and crystallized by the perspective of the narrative eye Kleist/G nderrode has more than a mere elective affinity to Virginia Woolf's Orlando The dis-memberment ex-

perienced by the literary characters Kleist and Günderrode is remembered by what Woolf called the «androgynous mind» «Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine »¹⁹ It is the female androgynous mind which writes *No Place Nowhere* It imagines a life which is not quantifiable but qualifiable The «life that cannot be lived» exists in the power of imagination which creates the work of fiction and in the receptivity of those who participate in it For the female writer there is no restrictive logocentricity, hence no image or Other upon which to transfer hope The authenticity of the self is the only place to go Female authorship as an intersubjective expansion of the self This landscape of «No Place Nowhere» is also a form of freedom «If people have to destroy certain examples of their own species out of cruelty or ignorance, out of indifference or fear, then we, relegated to destruction, incur an incredible freedom The freedom to love people and not to hate ourselves We know too much People will think we are mad Our inextinguishable belief, human beings are determined to complete themselves, which strictly contradicts the spirit of all times A delusion?»⁴⁰

NOTES

1 Cf Walter Benjamin, «The Author as Producer,» W B *Understanding Brecht* trans Ann Bostock, intro Stanley Mitchell, (London NLB 1973)

2 Heiner Müller, «Ein Brief,» H M , *Theater Arbeit* (West Berlin Rotbuch Verlag, 1975), p 126 My translation

3 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W Adorno *Dialectic of Enlightenment* trans John Cumming (New York Herder & Herder 1972) p 59

4 Berliner Ensemble 1975

5 *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel* ed Edith Anderson (Rostock VEB Hinstorff 1975)

6 Manuscript, 1980

7 Cf in particular Seghers' and Brecht's respective contributions to the realism debate of the 1930s, contained in part in *Marxismus und Literatur Eine Dokumentation in 3 Bänden* ed Fritz J Raddatz vol 2 (Reimbek Rowohlt, 1969)

8 *Die Zeit* March 17, 1978 My translation

9 Cf in particular Christa Wolf, *The Reader and the Writer* trans Joan Becker (Berlin Seven Seas, 1977) pp 177 212

- 10 Heiner Müller «Reflections on Post Modernism,» *New German Critique* 16 (Winter, 1979), 57
- 11 This theme is especially evident in Wolf's novel *The Quest for Christa T* trans Christopher Middleton (New York Farrar, and Straus Giroux 1970)
- 12 Cf Virginia Woolf *A Room of One's Own* (New York and London, 1957) pp 117 18
- 13 Heiner Müller *Hamletmaschine* in H M Mauser (West Berlin Rotbuch Verlag 1978) Christa Wolf, *Kein Ort Nirgends* (Darmstadt and Neuwied Luchterhand, 1979) All quotations that follow in my text are taken from these two editions and are rendered in my translation
- 14 *Hamletmaschine* pp 89 90
- 15 *Hamletmaschine* pp 94 95
- 16 *Hamletmaschine* p 97
- 17 *Hamletmaschine* p 94
- 18 *Hamletmaschine* p 92
- 19 *Hamletmaschine* p 96
- 20 Heiner Müller «Reflections on Post Modernism,» p 55
- 21 Christa Wolf «Der Schatten eines Traumes,» Karoline von Günderrode *Gedichte Prosa Briefe Zeugnisse von Zeitgenossen* ed Christa Wolf (Darmstadt and Neuwied Luchterhand 1979) p 8 My translation
- 22 Wolf, «Der Schatten » p 10
- 23 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* pp 58 59
- 24 Wolf, *Kein Ort Nirgends* p 104
- 25 Wolf *Kein Ort* p 113
- 26 Wolf, *Kein Ort* p 108
- 27 Wolf, *Kein Ort* pp 107 108
- 28 Quoted in Christa Wolf, «Der Schatten eines Traumes,» p 5 My translation
- 29 Wolf, *Kein Ort Nirgends* p 94
- 30 Wolf, *Kein Ort* pp 92 93
- 31 Wolf *Kein Ort* pp 94
- 32 Wolf *Kein Ort* p 119
- 33 Wolf *Kein Ort* p 137
- 34 Wolf *Kein Ort* p 137
- 35 Wolf *Kein Ort* pp 137 38
- 36 Wolf, *Kein Ort* p 150
- 37 Wolf, *Kein Ort*, pp 148 49
- 38 Christa Wolf, «Nun ja! Das nächste Leben geht aber heute an Ein Brief über die Bettine,» C W, *Lesen und Schreiben Neue Sammlung* (Darmstadt und Neuwied Luchterhand 1980), pp 316-17 My translation
- 39 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p 102
- 40 *Kein Ort Nirgends* pp 150 51

**SOCIALIST PATRIARCHY AND THE LIMITS OF
REFORM· A READING OF IRMTRAUD
MORGNER'S *LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF
TROUBADORA BEATRIZ AS CHRONICLED BY
HER MINSTREL LAURA***

BIDDY MARTIN
University of Wisconsin

Throughout the relatively short history of the German Democratic Republic, officials there have exploited the now well-known Marxist maxim that progress in a society can be measured by the status of women. Indeed, the government's claims to have achieved political, legal and economic equality for women have figured significantly as legitimization strategies for the GDR. This official and paternalistic «equal rights» approach to emancipation has perpetuated the belief that advances can be made on the economic and legal levels, while leaving the supposedly derivative and in fact more threatening micro-structural bases of power and oppression intact. However, despite the official protests against the necessity or possibility of a «feminist» movement or literature in the GDR, a number of texts appeared in the seventies which opened an important critical discussion of patriarchal structures, texts which begin implicitly, if not explicitly to expose and challenge the limits of an essentially reformist approach to sexuality and emancipation among GDR ideologues and within Marxist theory generally. It is not surprising that such texts should have appeared in the years following the Eighth Party Congress of the SED in 1971.¹ The economic stability that the GDR had achieved by the early seventies and the generosity that this stability initially allowed have made a more critical literature possible. And it is certainly not insignificant that more critical analyses of political, social and psychosexual structures of domination began to appear concurrent-

ly with the re-emergence of the Women's Movement as a critical force in the West

Writers like Christa Wolf, Gerti Tetzner, Brigitte Reimann, Irmtraud Morgner and Maxie Wander have begun to articulate the visible and damaging effects within the GDR of the historical oppression of women and the discursive repression of a «feminine» difference. In the process, they have succeeded in re-conceptualizing what was once defined and made structurally harmless as the «woman question». Christa Wolf has received the most attention among Western readers for having gone beyond the false project of legitimizing GDR socialism with illustrations of women's emancipation, in fact, her texts have exposed a very problematic relationship between socialism in that form and the emancipation of women or men. Like other GDR writers, Christa Wolf has elaborated the micro-structural bases of domination in ways that challenge the self-evidence of various GDR institutions and the «truths» on which they rest. Certainly, such anti-patriarchal literature in the GDR signals the kind of «insurrection of subjugated knowledges» against a regime of apparently self-evident and absolute certainties which, according to Michel Foucault, characterizes critical epistemological developments in the West during the past ten years.² The points of convergence between feminist and post-structuralist thought make Foucault's characterizations of such developments useful in our attempts to elaborate the significance for us of this anti-patriarchal literature in the GDR. What continues to fascinate us about this GDR literature are not only, and indeed, perhaps not primarily the explicit descriptions, validations and critiques for conditions of women in the GDR, these texts have an immediate informative value, but we read and re-read them not so much for what they say about women, but for what they do discursively, for what they contribute to the theoretical, political and literary projects in which we as Western scholars and feminists are engaged.

Irmtraud Morgner's very long and complex montage-novel, *Life and Adventures of Troubadora Beatriz as Chronicled by her Minstrel Laura* (1974)³ can be read as a textual field of struggle between oppositional knowledge and the theoretical and unitary discourse of traditional Marxism. Western critics have read the text as a compromising affirmation of the status quo and the GDR's «revolution» toward sexual equality on the one hand, and as a radical critique of that society, its patriarchal structures, and

legitimizing discourse on the other. The text actually takes up the question of women's emancipation within a socialist society more directly and more polemically than any other literary text to come out of the GDR. However, in spite of the polemics against patriarchy, and indeed, perhaps because of them, the text actually constrains the emancipatory possibilities which it opens up. The ruptures introduced into the text and the GDR by other insistent «feminine» desires are foreclosed by the discursive limitations of orthodox Marxist rhetoric and by the supposed historical necessities that govern the development of GDR society. *Life and Adventures* is thematically and structurally marked by the tension between the necessities of the GDR's «really existing socialism» and the unnamed and unassimilable desires, which intervene and which would defy the conceptual and political grasp of conventional wisdom and social structures.

The tensions develop around the fantastic legend of Beatriz de Dia, the medieval troubadora who enters the GDR in the late sixties after having awakened in France from an 810-year sleep. Beatriz' bonds with mythical and «real» female characters represent the structural and thematic intervention of unconscious and «irrational» desires into the repressive stability of GDR socialism and traditional textual authority. The complex and sustaining relationships among the women expose the micro-structural bases of patriarchal oppression by raising questions of family structure, sexuality and patterns of emotional and political dependency, questions which situate the constitution of power at the level of psychosexual relations. Their questions and unorthodox relationships begin to threaten conventional Marxist conceptions of the meaning of emancipation. Indeed, the threat which Beatriz and female bonding pose to social stability and ideological certainties is emphasized throughout the text by the fears and rationalized denials with which various GDR characters respond to that challenge, for many of the male characters, Beatriz and her fantastic presence clearly represent a world without absolutes, without Fathers, without surrogate gods of any kind, a world which is not only threatening, but unimaginable. Beatriz brings the fantastic, the extravagant, the impossible and the erotic to bear on the apparently «natural» order, its discursive underpinnings and its literary representation, her exploits and textual interventions have the potential for exposing the political nature of conventional distinctions between the reasonable and unreasonable, between

natural and unnatural, between truth and fiction

The subversively feminine, then, is not read in terms of a fictionalized or mythologized biological essence, rather, femininity is identified with historically repressed forms of knowing, desiring and relating, with knowledge and experiences that threaten and are consequently unthinkable within the bounded certainties of a hierarchical social and cultural order. The emancipation of women, in its most threatening moments, figures both thematically and structurally as the emancipation of desire and imagination from the bonds of pragmatism and rationality which would contain the multiplicity and particularity of desire within systematizing theory and conventional familial structures. Having made women's different desires, experiences and relationships with one another a legitimate subject of interest, the text necessarily introduces conflicts and struggles which threaten traditional political, social, and sexual orders, and textual coherence. However, this text restores thematic and structural order by burying these conflicts that it has opened up and cannot erase. Resistance to the unnamed and undomesticated desires which Beatriz brings to light is not only exerted thematically through the polemical gestures of conformist GDR characters, but structurally through the text's insistence on political and conceptual closure as well. While the text rhetorically asserts the possibility and necessity of women's emancipation in the GDR, it structurally negates that proposition by moving with linear logic toward the subsumption of Beatriz' «difference» under the teleological necessities of GDR Marxism. Ultimately, the difference Beatriz makes is appropriated and robbed of its subversiveness by a reformed socialist patriarchy. The movement of the text reduces Beatriz' role to that of reformer or rational enlightener, and the unconscious, unsystematic and unassimilated desires are made harmless or denied altogether. With the death of Beatriz and her disappearance from the text, the necessity and possibility of conflict are negated by a synthesis which restores harmony to GDR reality and to the text. This synthesis is represented paradigmatically by the supposedly self-evident and in fact textually unconvincing heterosexual marriage of Beatriz' GDR counterpart Laura to Benno Pakulat, the progressive son of a very orthodox Marxist. Ultimately, then, neither the GDR nor its narrative representation tolerate a «presence» which is outside their systematizing grasp. This is a text which exposes both the limits of its own explicit analysis of patriarchy and the patriarchal bases of political and

social stability in the GDR

Certainly, the contradictory effects of the form(s) of this text produce such thematic and structural tensions. Morgner has incorporated and strategically juxtaposed a variety of forms, including short prose pieces, documentary sketches, and a wealth of legal and scientific materials which set up and contribute to the thematic ambiguity around distinctions between fiction and truth. The juxtapositions of myth, «fiction» and documentary involve an irony which seems to, and in fact, does at times challenge the accepted boundaries between the real and the unreal. However, the fictional and the unreal are ultimately subordinated to theoretical and historical «truths,» and myth works in the end to substantiate supposed historical necessities. It is crucial to both read and demonstrate these coexisting impulses.

The heterogeneous fragments take shape around the life, adventures, and death of Beatriz, whose mere presence would appear to disrupt the «rationality» of GDR realist conventions. The text's epistemological, thematic and stylistic tensions are developed around her relationship to her minstrel Laura Salman. In a preface to the text, Beatriz' minstrel Laura sells GDR writer Irmtraud Morgner the chronicles of Beatriz de Dia's life, and Morgner accepts a task which will apparently involve destroying the conventionally accepted distinctions between history and myth. This exchange between Laura and Morgner, an exchange which supposedly precedes the «fictional text,» not only challenges realist conventions but quite effectively blurs the distinction between experience and its representation. Moreover, the transaction establishes a network of female narrative voices without distinct identities so that distinctions between experiencing, documenting, and «fictionalizing» become problematic and subject to an historical and political reading.

The task of destroying patriarchal myths does not appear to take the form of asserting new truths to supplant traditional truths. Instead, Morgner's imaginative rewriting of patriarchal myths actually highlights rather than obscures its imaginative and political bases. Demeter and Persephone, for example, once the mythical victims of the power of the gods, and Melusine, a harmless mermaid, become defiant political agitators who not only exist outside of recorded history, but call the foundations of that historical record into question, and disrupt history's apparent linear necessity. These new «myths» certainly do not represent an attempt to

reconstruct a «real» but neglected women's history or to mythologize biological difference, the reader is engaged here at least sub-textually in an ironic exploration of the political implications and bases of chronologies and historical accuracies. In fact, the use of myth and legend in this text can be read in much the same way that Sylvia Bovenschen has read Western feminists' appropriation of the past in terms of «a sensitivity to the underground existence of forbidden images. In turning to an historical image, women do not address the historical phenomenon itself but rather its symbolic potential »'

These radical impulses in the use of myth and history are obscured, however, by the traditional Marxist content of the refashioned legends. And it is instructive to review briefly the underlying form which these new legends take. Unable to adapt to the patriarchal and oppressive Middle Ages, Beatriz de Dia is charmed out of history by the members of Queen Saba's Round Table. It is not clear how Queen Saba obtained possession of the castle between «Kaerllion and Usk and the Future» after the death of Arthur in 542, what is clear is that the foundation of this Round Table depended upon the cooperation between Saba and the defeated goddesses Demeter and Persephone. During the sixth century, Persephone granted eternal life to a group of proud, politically astute women who were fighting for the restoration of matriarchy and agreed to agitate on Persephone's behalf. In the twelfth century, the «schöne Melusine» pledged her support to the group of forty eight women and later led a secret opposition to a majority victory in the Round Table. It was in 1871, the year of the French Commune, that this opposition introduced the political struggle of the working class and with it the first male members to the Round Table. By 1918, there was parity in the organization and the struggle was no longer aimed at the restoration of matriarchy, but toward the victory of the working class and equality under socialism. As an agent of the legendary Round Table, Beatriz is given the reformist task of raising consciousness in the GDR, a society assumed to be legally, politically and economically «free» of patriarchal vestiges. On the level of explicit content, then, the renamings and interpretations are the undisguised reconstruction of a traditional Marxist analysis, which would equate progress in the struggle against patriarchy with progress in the struggle against capitalism. The primacy established in 1918 of socialism as the appropriate struggle for women keeps the orthodox view of women's

oppression and emancipation intact, even within imaginatively retold myths and legends Beatriz' challenge to such reductive arguments of simultaneity between socialist and feminist struggles continues to operate only on a sub-textual level where the discursive incompatibilities between GDR Marxism and the feminist inquiry are exposed in spite of explicit rhetoric to the contrary

Several interrelated fictional story lines are developed within the text to represent GDR «reality» Morgner's own unpublished novel, *Rumba auf einen Herbst*, a novel written within the previous conventions of realism in the GDR, is found in fragments strategically located throughout the text, juxtaposed to pieces which historicize not only its content, but its form as well Three *Bitterfelder Fruchte*, relatively long prose sections which document the life and work of GDR workers, also offer «realistic» representations of the GDR in the more traditional sense ' However, these sections actually tend to demystify traditional romantic notions of work and productivity in that society, illustrating not only changes in the nature of work but developments in the literature and cultural politics as well The third *Bitterfelder* piece defies realist conventions by exploring the life and death of scientist Vera Hill, a woman who can reconcile her identities as scientist and mother only as long as she can fly (on her own power) to and from work Vera Hill falls from the sky and dies tragically when community censure and her colleague's lack of faith in the possibility of flying become overwhelming The very obvious allusion to the persecution of witches contributes to the textual representation of femininity and difference as profound threats to psychic and social stability, and to narrative consistency The «fictionalization» of Vera Hill's death further exposes the systematic repression of those possibilities and meanings which defy the fictional coherence dictated by particular power relations, the constitution of truth and reality is revealed again to be a fundamentally political process

In addition to the prose fiction, documentary sections assert evidence of legal, political and social conditions in the GDR Again, the juxtaposition of the documents with accounts of everyday conflict situations contributes to the text's structural and thematic ambiguities Perhaps the most significant and least ambiguous instance is the legalization of abortion, which figures both thematically and structurally as a turning point in the text As narrator and narrated character, Laura Salman identifies that change as the condition of possibility for women's control over their lives

Textually, the documentation of that legal reform marks the beginning of Beatriz' increasing domesticity and growing similarity to Laura, her apparent superfluity and eventual death and disappearance from the text. Clearly, this linear development erases conflict and subordinates women's desires and political interventions to legal and political changes effected from above. A rather orthodox analysis emerges out of a structural logic which privileges the macro-structural forces as the real forces of social change, clearly separating those forces from the local bases of power.

The montage structure would appear to open the text to multiple readings, however, it also works at reducing itself to a single and systematic analysis. The justifications for such a montage are very explicitly elaborated within the text in an interview which Beatriz' minstrel Laura grants the publishers at *Aufbau Verlag* in Beatriz' name:

Die orthodoxe Romanform verlangt Festhalten an einer Konzeption über mehrere Jahre. Das kann angesichts heftiger politischer Bewegungen in der Welt und einer ungeheuerlichen Informationsflut heute nur trägen oder sturen Naturen gelingen. Was ich anbiete, ist die Romanform der Zukunft. Die zum operativen Genre gehört. Abgesehen vom Temperament, entspricht kurze Prose dem gesellschaftlich, nicht biologisch bedingten Lebensrhythmus einer gewöhnlichen Frau, die ständig von haushaltsbedingten Abhaltungen zerstreut wird.⁶

(The orthodox novel form demands adherence to one perspective over a period of many years, something which is possible only for lazy or stubborn minds, given the intense political activity in the world and the overwhelming flood of information. What I am offering you is the novel of the future, which belongs to the operative genre. Quite aside from temperament, it appears that short prose corresponds to the socially, not biologically determined rhythm of the average woman's life, a life of constant interruptions which result from the demands of housework and childcare.)

At other points in the text, Beatriz articulates the dangers inherent in «great conceptions» which reduce reality and meaning to

the fictional coherence of global theories «Feminine» writing and knowing are explicitly associated with the unconcluded and the erotic Beatriz sends her minstrel the following message

Romanschriftsteller bezeichnete Beatriz als Leute, die aus Feigheit ihre Gedanken in fremden Köpfen verstecken Und überhaupt warnte Beatriz die Freundin vor einer großen Arbeit Sie schrieb «Das ist eben, woran unsere Besten leiden, gerade diejenigen, in denen das meiste Talent und das tüchtigste Streben vorhanden sind Denn die Gegenwart will ihre Rechte, was sich täglich dem Dichter an Gedanken und Empfindungen aufdrängt, das will und soll ausgesprochen werden Hat man aber ein größeres Werk im Kopfe, so kann nichts daneben aufkommen »

(Beatriz characterized novelists as people who, out of cowardice, hid their own thoughts in others' heads And she warned her friend quite generally against great works She wrote «That is precisely the problem with our best writers, those with the greatest talent and worthiest aspirations because the present moment demands its rights, the thoughts and sensations which force themselves on the writer every day demand and deserve expression When one has a greater work in mind, nothing outside of it can arise)

This textual montage intends to challenge traditional realist conventions and to deconstruct the transcendent and all-knowing narrator, certainly, the juxtaposition of genres and the disrespectful irony succeed at points in subverting textual and extra-textual limitations on meaning and possibility There is also an apparent refusal to privilege one form of knowing over another, to distinguish the important from the unimportant, or the global from the small and close-at-hand The combination of literary forms and representational practices certainly has the potential for exposing the process of writing as a political exercise of choice, exclusion and control However, these impulses are regulated and constrained by the conceptual coherence of an orthodox Marxist analysis and a loyalty to the GDR status quo which limit and control textual meaning with an imposing finality In fact, the textual heterogeneity and apparent skepticism with respect to truth are systematized by the logic and language of traditional Marxist discourse, by the

repeated and explicit affirmations of economic, social and political structures in the GDR. A fragmented text, which appears to democratize the relationship between reader and writer actually exercises a fundamentally undemocratic authorial function by situating official «truths» at the center of an apparently open text. This superficially experimental text compromises its avowed radicality by representing a pre-given reality in fragments which ultimately add up to a perfectly pre-constituted and harmonious whole.

The relationship between narrators and narrated reality illustrates the problem still further. This text lacks the intimacy and depth of a text such as Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T* (1969) because it does not experiment with a «self» in process, but focuses instead on the individual's confrontations with an apparently separate and given social and economic structure. Whole coherent subjects confront one another and an already constituted social sphere, the process of social change remains exterior to the self, and personal or individual change is conceived in terms of a derivative and rational «enlightenment». The classical bourgeois conceptual and political split between the individual and the social is perpetuated by a Marxism which resists a materialist analysis of subjectivity.

The montage actually culminates in the structurally disappointing harmlessness of a good-night-story about the legendary Beatriz de Dia, a story told by the progressive husband Benno to his wife (and Beatriz' minstrel) Laura. Point of view is significantly transferred here to the «feminized» male voice, a voice which diminishes Beatriz' extravagant fantasies and her bond with Laura by relegating them again to the safely separate realm of fable and myth. The silencing of women effected by this switch to a male narrator can be read as the condition of possibility for the marital harmony, for the order and narrative closure, for the careful distinctions between reality and fantasy restored at the text's close. This closure obscures, though it cannot completely erase, the ruptures introduced by extravagantly feminine fantasy into the text, fantasy and desire which persist in spite of the institutional appropriation and control which would gather them safely back into the status quo.

This structural appropriation of difference can be elaborated with respect to thematic development as well, in particular with respect to Beatriz' impact on various GDR characters. Her impact

on a figure like Uwe Parnitzke offers a particularly interesting illustration of «her» sub-textual meanings and her textual appropriation. From a thematic point of view, direct contact between Beatriz and Parnitzke is brief and tangential, however, the reader necessarily brings Beatriz' radical uncertainties and eroticism to bear on the rigidity and conformism which this journalist represents.

Beatriz first hears of the GDR from Parnitzke, whom she meets while still in the streets of Paris in 1968. Discounting the possibility of emancipation in the capitalist West, Beatriz follows him to the place which she begins with varying degrees of irony to call the «Promised Land». Parnitzke's own lack of promise in her eyes introduces the skepticism with which Beatriz will continue to expose and counter rampant mystifications of the GDR and its «really existing socialism». Parnitzke actually figures, in a sense, as a patriarchal principle which unifies the three most significant and threatening female characters in their oppositional practices. He is identified as the former husband not only of Beatriz' minstrel and counterpart Laura, but also of Valeska Kantus, a woman whose sex change experiment is recounted near the end of the text and is characterized as a gospel. In contrast to the women's openness and sensuality, Parnitzke remains a victim of patriarchal power relations and the position he has taken up within them. He represents the fears that underlie bureaucratic pragmatism, unquestioning conformism and unerotic and rigid loyalty to reason and authority. Parnitzke is a man who seeks a mother in the woman to whom he is married, and a strong father-figure to fill the space of an absent God. Nostalgic for Stalin, he longs for a world of discipline and order, for the psychic and social stability which seem to depend upon the repression of the outlaw femininity. His profound anxieties reveal again and again the extent to which challenges to patriarchy are associated with lack of control, lack of certainty and stability, and with a force more threatening than the rhetorically acknowledged threats from the capitalist West.

This anxiety is generalized to other male characters in the text, and developed very movingly in accounts of the acute fears of Oskar Pakulat, an older worker and the father of Laura's husband-to-be Benno. In a moment of crisis, Pakulat, who is distraught over his son's lack of respect for authority and tradition, identifies his son's «madness» with femininity and his problems with women. At one particularly acute moment, he cries: «We men have to stick

together » A «femininity» which is not defined or circumscribed by rational and essentially male principles, which transgresses conventional boundaries, figures once again as the spoken and unspoken enemy to what is given as a «natural» order. The deeply rooted fears produced and exploited by patriarchal power structures perpetuate the need for and tolerance of structures of domination.

The textual tension between a dogmatic insistence on absolutes and a pleasure in the unknown is extended to the realm of science and its claim to truth. Again, Parnitzke's indirect relationship to Beatriz figures significantly in the conflict developed between the systematic and the erotic. Parnitzke, who is assigned to cover a meeting of physicists, is confronted and confused by the scientist Wenzel Morolf and his passion for the unknown and unknowable. Both Morolf and the women scientists whose work is explored in the text assert the validity of the speculative sciences and characterize their work as an erotic struggle on the boundaries of the unnamed and the unknown against the tyranny of the pragmatic and applied sciences, which Parnitzke would privilege in the name of the Party. In fact, it is Morolf who makes the only explicit allusion in the text to Dante's Beatrice, and he makes the allusion in an attempt to elaborate his own relation to science and knowledge.

Der Kampf mit dem Unbekannten ist stets ein sinnliches Erlebnis. In der Göttlichen Komödie läßt er sich selber—paradoxiert durch die verewigte Beatrice, die er als Tote in junglinghaft-asketischer Überanstrengung ziemlich lange geliebt hat, bis der Gegenschlag kam—belehren. Nur durch die Sinne kann Verstand erfassen, was er hernach erst zur Vernunft erhebt.⁴

The struggle with the unknown is always a sensual experience. In *The Divine Comedy*, he is taught—paradoxically by the deceased Beatrice, whom he had loved for a rather long time with youthful, ascetic overexertion until the counterblow came—only through the senses can the mind comprehend what it then exalts as reason.

This tension between the pragmatic and the «irrational» also characterizes Beatriz' relationship to her minstrel Laura. Contact between the two women is introduced thematically during the

period of Beatriz' work in a GDR circus. Laura's criticisms of Beatriz for trivializing the «real» medieval troubadour in a circus act initiate the contrast between Laura's pragmatic realism and loyalty to official political and cultural policies and Beatriz' «naive» extravagance. Laura represents what is supposedly the more historically conscious side of what will become one single character with the death of Beatriz at the end of the text.

Beatriz' minstrel is represented as the daughter of a train engineer, Johann Salman, whose contribution to the development of the GDR is recounted in one of the *Bitterfelder Früchte*, Laura's mother Olga is a frustrated housewife whose desire to be put to sleep until less patriarchal times is granted by the agents of the Round Table. Clearly, like Benno Pakulat, Laura represents a «new generation» of socialists who are unwilling to (and apparently need not) subordinate personal, subjective or individual questions to the exigencies of a supposedly collective public sphere. Her direct experience of oppressive attitudes and institutions within the GDR certainly legitimizes Beatriz' zealous critiques. However, Laura maintains a pragmatic historical optimism and loyalty to the system throughout. Her situation evolves and improves in direct proportion to and as a result of changes in conditions outside of her immediate activity, system developments such as greater social and economic stability which «allow» certain questions to be raised, and which «allow» for more «feminist» men, more equitable laws, greater access to untraditional jobs. In spite of the carefully constructed familial backgrounds, Laura's intrapsychic conflicts are left largely unexplored and the individual subject is elaborated in terms of roles and attitudes which are apparently both derived from and changed by factors outside human interactions and intervention.

Beatriz' death figures significantly in this reading of the text's reformist limits. The troubadour dies some time after returning from a trip to the West where she has gone in search of the unicorn and anaximander, the elixir which she hopes will change consciousness and conditions in the GDR by undoing sex roles and eroticizing relations of all kinds. This final trip to the West juxtaposes western capitalist conditions to the promise of the GDR, so that Beatriz' radical critiques and desires are mitigated by the insights she wins into historical and political necessities. Her trip takes her to Italy where she is confronted with the «illusion» of radical solutions. The unicorn she finds in the streets of Venice

becomes a harmless house pet, a supposedly integral part of every day life in the GDR. Once again, the importance of struggle and active intervention is negated as the potentially radical implications of sexual emancipation are confined and domesticated within the reformed bourgeois happy home. After her return to the GDR, Beatriz' perspectives on change grow increasingly similar to those of her minstrel Laura, whose attitudes become somewhat more critical in turn. In fact, Beatriz alarms Laura with her sudden domesticity and confinement to the home, Laura actually foretells the troubadora's death when she articulates the rather obvious fact that her friend is making herself superfluous. After Beatriz' death, Laura is whisked off in her sleep to be initiated into the Round Table in Beatriz' place, then returned to her husband Benno with the task of working for «attitudinal» changes in the GDR.

The synthesis effected here between Beatriz' radical zeal and Laura's historical realism can be read in very different ways. On the level of the explicit, the text suggests that Beatriz' utopian, fantastic impulse has been integrated into GDR reality in the figure of Laura, who combines then the legendary and the fantastic with patient pragmatism and «realism.» Beatriz' idealism and her desires are mitigated but not erased by the complex conditions of change as they operate in the GDR, indeed, her extravagant desires have exposed and challenged the unquestioning conformism of GDR characters with a refusal to accept the status quo as sufficient or unalterable. Still, there are thematic and structural problems with this apparently happy ending. When Laura explains to Morgner in the preface that she could not write Beatriz' story herself because she would not know whether it should induce laughter or tears, she introduces an ambivalence with respect to Beatriz' death which remains throughout. Certainly, the text's thematic and structural closure would erase the possibility of a desire which transgresses or defies the appropriating grasp of conventional theoretical, political and narrative systems. The text removes the difference that Beatriz and her political, cultural and emotional solidarity with Laura have made by subsuming that difference within a conceptual synthesis represented by the heterosexual marriage of Laura to Benno. With the domestication and death of Beatriz, struggle and conflict disappear, unconscious desires are defined as safely conscious attitudes, and the female bonding which has provided the disruptive and critical potential in the text is unconvincingly suppressed in favor of a nervously asserted heterosexuality.

The text's final domesticity points not only to political necessities and limitations in the GDR context, but also to the discursive limitations of traditional Marxism, to its inability to explain the social construction of the sexed subject in other than overly economic or functionalist terms, and its refusals to conceptualize the body and sexuality as privileged bases of political power. I have attempted to identify the limitations which Morgner's adherence to the GDR status quo and to a rather orthodox Marxist analysis of patriarchy impose on a text which both opens up and then constrains struggles, conflicts and difference. In spite of its polemical and explicit affirmations of possibilities for emancipation in the GDR, the text exercises significant suppressions of meaning by compromising its own radical affirmations of uncertainty and its own refusals of absolutes. The struggle within and outside this text between an incipiently materialist analysis of the relations between sexuality, knowledge and power on the one hand, and an entrenched orthodoxy with respect to these relations on the other will continue to engage us here and in the GDR for a long time.

NOTES

- 1 The Eighth Party Congress of the SED (Socialist Unity Party) held in 1971 the year in which Walter Ulbricht stepped down from his post as party secretary effectively contradicted Ulbricht's pronouncements of the late sixties that antagonistic economic contradictions had been overcome and socialism realized in the GDR. Whereas Ulbricht's policy had left little room for criticisms or discussions of still-existing problems and contradictions in the GDR, the Eighth Party Congress opened the way for more open discussion.
- 2 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 81.
- 3 *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1974). West German edition published by Luchterhand, Darmstadt und Neuwied, 1976.
- 4 Sylvia Bovenschen, «The Contemporary Witch, The Historical Witch, and the Witch Myth» *New German Critique* 15 (Fall 1978): 87.
- 5 Morgner's *Bitterfelder Früchte* are, of course, allusions to and examples of (though at times exaggerated and consequently ironic) the kind of literature called for in the late fifties and early sixties by workers and writers concerned about the

gap between the actual problems of socialist life in the GDR and the portrayal of socialism in socialist realist literature. Until the development of the so called *Bitterfelder Weg* the GDR had not really had a national literature that dealt with the situation of workers in that society and writers were urged to enter the world of the workers, write about their lives and help workers begin to write themselves.

6 Morgner p 258

7 Morgner pp 271 272

8 Morgner p 641

**IN THE CEMETERY OF THE
MURDERED DAUGHTERS
INGEBORG BACHMANN'S *MALINA***

SARA LENNOX

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

But do you see, she said, he forgot that on the spot
where he erased her she remained anyway She can be
read from it because nothing's there where she's suppos-
ed to be

Bachmann, *Der Fall Franza*¹

Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* is about the absence of a female voice, in some respects it reads like an illustration of the feminist theory which has evolved since its publication to explain why, within Western discourse, women are permitted no voice and subjectivity of their own It may be that feminism is the collective struggle of women to constitute that voice, but that battle has barely begun In what voice, then, does a female scholar write about the absence of a female voice? I have realized that my struggle with *Malina*, Bachmann's struggle to write it, and the struggle she describes in it are part of the larger war in which we women (against our will and often without our conscious knowledge) are combatants—and which may have killed Bachmann «Our bodies, falling, will dam that great river of sexism,» Tillie Olsen said last year at the MLA, «and over us others will pass » Feminist literary scholars still speak mostly with that sovereign (male) voice which explains the literary text to less astute readers (What other choice do we have, particularly given our precarious position at the edge of academics?—We have to play by their rules) But *Malina* shows what women lose when they try to accommodate themselves to the categories of male subjectivity Though Bachmann is without solu-

tions herself, we feminists can read her novel as part of our struggle to challenge those categories within which we have no right to speak as women, and to construct some other, more authentic, female voice

Bachmann explained in a 1972 interview that her novel *Malina*, published in the previous year, had provided her with solutions to problems of composition with which she had struggled for years. With *Malina* as opening or overture, she could proceed with her work in progress, a mammoth novel cycle entitled «*Todesarten*» «I wrote almost a thousand pages before this book, and these last 400 pages from the very last years became the beginning that I had always lacked. I didn't find the entrance to that book—and for me this has now become the book which makes my access to the «Ways of Death» possible.»³ How, the interviewer asks, did she happen upon the double figure of Malina and the *Ich* of the novel?

For me it's one of the oldest, if almost inaccessible memories that I always knew I had to write this book—very early already, while I was still writing poems. That I constantly searched for the main character. That I knew it would be male. That I could only narrate from the standpoint of a male character. But I often asked myself: Why? I didn't understand, in the stories either, why I so often had to use a male «I.» It was like finding my character to be able not to deny this female «I» and nonetheless to emphasize the male «I.»³

Of all the authors mentioned in *Malina*, not a single one is a woman. For Bachmann, there *is* no female narrative voice. At the end of the novel, the female *Ich* disappears into a crack in the wall, and only Malina is left. «It was murder» (III, 337), reads the novel's last line. «Malina will be able to tell us,» Bachmann explains, the 'I,' left behind for him » what the other part of his character,⁴ These are the «*Todesarten*,» told in *Malina*'s male voice, experienced by the female *Ich* and the cause of her destruction.

The novel *Malina* itself has been badly received and ill-understood since its publication in 1971. Most recently, Marcel Reich-Ranicki called it Bachmann's «late, incidentally weak and confused novel,»⁵ in the latest installment of the *Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* Bernd Witte gives

probably the most accurate assessment of the novel yet, but in his limited space must ignore most of the work's difficulty.⁶ But *Malina* is a difficult work, and its relative inaccessibility is tied very closely to its subject matter. Before her death, Bachmann published another volume of prose, the short story collection *Simultan*, which seems to be part of the «*Todesarten*» cycle, since its characters appear also in *Malina* and the cycle's unfinished novels. In 1978, four volumes of Bachmann's collected works appeared, including the mostly completed novel *Der Fall Franza*, the novel fragment *Requiem für Fanny Goldmann*, and some longer fragments whose position in the larger cycle is not clear. The *Werke* also contain Bachmann's essays from the fifties and sixties. From these various writings, it is possible to conclude a great deal about Bachmann's purposes for the «*Todesarten*» in general and *Malina* in particular, why these subjects were ones which concerned Bachmann from the time she began writing, and why, most specifically, the struggle to find a narrative voice to tell the «*Todesarten*» realized itself in a text which took the shape of *Malina*.

Trained as a philosopher at the University of Vienna by one of the last of the grand old men of logical positivism,⁷ Bachmann explored her concern with the possibilities of language from her student days onward. From the beginning, however, her examination of language was an idiosyncratic one, more akin to the concerns of present-day poststructuralism than to mainstream logical positivism, as her two essays from the fifties on Wittgenstein show. For what interests Bachmann most about Wittgenstein is not his analysis of what language *can* say, but what it can't. «The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.» For Wittgenstein, a mystical appropriation of the world is also possible which does not participate in the limitations of language. «There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself, it is the mystical.» What Bachmann finds in Wittgenstein is the possibility of a response to the world which transcends the categories of occidental reason, as she quite explicitly indicates in her radio essay.

FIRST SPEAKER Does Wittgenstein not in fact come to the same conclusion as Pascal? Let's hear what the author of the *Pensées* said three hundred years before him. «The last step of reason is the recognition that there is an infinitude of things that surpass it.»

SECOND SPEAKER Wittgenstein took this last step of

reason He who says like Wittgenstein «God does not reveal himself in the world» says also implicitly «Vere tu es deus absconditus » For about what should one keep silent if not about that beyond limits—about the hidden god, about the ethical and aesthetic as mystical experiences of the heart which take place in the unsayable (IV, 120)

Moreover, Bachmann pursues this line of thought in Wittgenstein's work into his later *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, where she identifies his project as an attempt to abolish the language of philosophy, understood as a system of abstract categories, and substitute for it some other way of speaking which is closer to the texture of daily life «It is Wittgenstein's conviction that philosophy has to be brought to rest by us so that it is no longer tormented by questions which place *it itself* in question, and he believed that we can silence the problems if our language functions well and sensibly, if it lives and breathes in *use* Only where language, which is a form of life, is taken out of use, where it runs dry—and that happens, in his opinion, when it is used philosophically, in the usual sense—do problems come about These problems are not to be solved, but rather to be gotten rid of» (IV, 124) Using metaphors which will emerge again in the «*Todesarten*,» Bachmann argues that Wittgenstein's philosophy will undertake a healing of the sickness which philosophical problems now represent «And since language is a labyrinth of ways—as he terms it at another point—philosophy must take up the struggle against the bewitching of our understanding through language Philosophy must destroy castles in the air and reveal the basis of language, it must be like a therapy, for philosophical problems are sicknesses which have to be healed It's not a solution, but a cure that he calls for» (IV, 124) The implications of what Bachmann hints at here are far-reaching she points towards fundamental and inherent defects of our present language (which is to say, of the entire mode of thought that we know), which her choice of metaphor allies with the human body or psyche («therapy,» «sickness») and which can be overcome only through some transformation in the present condition of language/philosophy, that is, of present human categories of thought

But Bachmann's essays also identify ways of speaking already outside the categories of Western reason Particularly interesting is her essay on Georg Groddeck, to whom her short story «Ihr

glücklichen Augen» in *Simultan* is dedicated Groddeck, a psychoanalyst slightly older than Freud and loosely allied with him, originated the term «It» («Id») which represented for him the speech of the body. For Groddeck, Bachmann explains, a physical symptom «is a production, like an artistic one, and sickness means something. It wants to say something, it says it by its particular way of appearing, running its course, and disappearing or ending fatally. It says what the sick person doesn't understand, although it's his most particular expression.» Passionately, Bachmann speaks of Groddeck's recognition of the power of the It over the relatively powerless ego. «The *It* is a word he uses for lack of better, it's not a thing in itself but is supposed to mean something's there, it's there and stronger and much stronger than the ego, for the ego can't even intentionally intervene in breathing, in digestion, in blood circulation, the ego is a mask, a pretension with which all of us go about, and we are ruled by the *It*, the *It* does that, and it speaks through sickness in symbols.» (IV, 352) Important here is Bachmann's insistence that human desire cannot be contained, though its needs refuse the categories which the ego has accepted, and her allying of the speech, the attempt to signify, of Groddeck's It to artistic productions, where that which the ego had not wanted to say or known it was saying can break through into signifying material and speak itself behind the back, against the will, of the signifying subject.

Finally, a variety of Bachmann's essays from this earlier period as well as several short stories and her radio play *Der gute Gott von Manhattan* address head on the role of Eros as source both of resistance to this social order and of the possible articulation of some alternative to it. The subversive power of Eros is also associated with the mysticism on which she had touched in the Wittgenstein essay, a mode of articulation beyond the borders of language. The influence of Critical Theory is apparent here, not simply Marcuse, but also Bloch: love is a concrete utopia which points towards some future social order less hostile to human happiness. However, to understand the relevance of these utopian love affairs for the «*Todesarten*» it is also necessary to recognize that they are anti-social, contravening fundamental social taboos, and this dimension of the revolt of desire is exactly what constitutes their utopianism. Bachmann's radio essay on Proust, whom she terms a «positivist and mystic» (IV, 180), concentrates mainly on the theme of homosexuality in his work. «The latent revolt of the individual against society, nature against morality, lead him to the

conception of the 'homme traqué,' the hounded, surrounded human being of whom the invert is only an especially clear example» (IV, 160) As Bachmann explains it, the love of Musil's Ulrich for his sister Agathe more clearly still elaborates a utopian alternative with explicit social relevance. This love is an alternative, ecstatic, quasi-mystical condition of mind which, though not itself applicable to a changed social order, fulfills its function in negating and disrupting the present dominant order. «It's true that the 'other condition' leads from society into absolute freedom, but now Ulrich knows that the utopia of this other life makes no prescriptions for the practice of life and for a life in society has to be replaced by the utopia of the given social condition—Musil calls it that of the 'inductive attitude.' But both utopias bring about the replacement of closed ideologies with open ones» (IV, 27). Moreover—and this is of major importance for the «*Todesarten*»—for Bachmann the order of thought that Ulrich's ecstasy opposes, those closed ideologies, has a direct and causal connection to war, a term which here includes not just the national conflicts of the twentieth century, but the general state of contemporary society. «Not only the case of Kakania has shown that thinking in closed ideologies leads directly to war, and the permanent war of faith is still the order of the day» (IV, 27).

A variety of Bachmann's earlier creative writings also locate a basic resistance to the dominant order of thought in love, so that to pursue this love would be almost to foment revolution, to change the world utterly. «Ein Schritt nach Gomorrah,» «Ein Wildermuth,» «Undine geht» from *Das dreißigste Jahr*. But though with the exception of «Ein Schritt nach Gomorrah» these loves are taboo only in that they are illicit, what is important to notice with respect to the particular relevance of these stories to the «*Todesarten*» is that the promise of satisfaction for which desire longs is embodied in women. In *Der gute Gott von Manhattan*, love is «the other condition» and a «border crossing» (I, 317), which Jan, the man, cannot sustain. He retreats to a corner bar, «relapsed, and for a moment order reached out its arms to him» (I, 327). Jennifer, the woman, keeps the faith, and is blown sky-high by the Good God to reestablish his divine, patriarchal normality.

It is not clear (nor does it matter much) whether a coherent theory underlies these various concerns of Bachmann's earlier writing—though it is hard to believe that this erudite woman, with her particular interests in philosophy, psychology, and language,

did not follow the latest developments in European thought in the sixties and seventies. But, in any case, that theory exists now (a theory which addresses the problem of coherence and incoherence), and can be used to explain the conjuncture of interests that meet in the «*Todesarten*». For even the most superficial reading of Bachmann's late prose should make clear *who* is being killed in these various ways (and also that «*Tod*» can be the death of the spirit as well as of the body) women. Recent feminist theory, drawing particularly on the work of Derrida and Lacan, argues that the oppression of women is structured into the fundamental categories of our thought, which must be transformed if women are to achieve an autonomous subjectivity of their own. This order, as Derrida argues, is logocentric, predicated on the assertion of a logos, a central term or presence-to-itself (whose name has varied historically: God, essence, substance, consciousness, man, etc.) against which all other terms are measured. The laws of logocentricity which structure all our thought are learned through the child's appropriation of language and comprise its fundamental categories. But as Lacanian psychoanalysis maintains, through this entry into language infants are also constituted as gendered human beings: to take on language means to accede to the channelling of infant desire into socially appropriate expressions and to assume one's proper place in the gendered order. For women, this means to accept both the preeminence of the phallus, Lacan's «transcendental signifier,» and the «fact» of their own castration. So long as they fail to revolt against this order, women logically and in fact will be associated with the negative term of a logocentric and phallogocentric order: object, nature, other, absence, silence, lack. Derrida's endeavor is of course to deconstruct self-identity, presence-to-itself, by showing that it was never that which it asserted itself to be. Bachmann's intent in the «*Todesarten*» and more particularly in *Malina*, I would like to argue here, is a similar one. This work, with which she struggled for so long, shows that the destruction of women—though it be a destruction they accept themselves—is a necessary consequence of the order in which they live. But even as they are destroyed, they speak, cry out, rebel: their desire will not be completely contained. Feminism barely existed when Bachmann died in 1973, and she can only conceive of women as victims. Perhaps we are farther than that today—but it is important that we know what she has to tell us.

The dilemma that Bachmann confronts and represents in

Malina involves women's place in the symbolic order. How can it be possible for her, a woman, to write about women when exactly what she wishes to assert makes her own position as woman wielding the pen impossible? This awareness of oneself as a contradiction in terms traces its way through *Malina* in recurrent phrases which express both extraordinary pain and perseverance «Those who have to live a Why can endure almost any How» and, most poignantly, in view of Bachmann's own death by fire, «Avec ma main brûlée, j'écris sur la nature du feu » Damaged herself, she will insist on overcoming her injuries to write of their causes. But what voice does she assume? In her introduction to *The Lesbian Body*, Monique Wittig addressed this problem of the lack of a female I in our language: subjectivity is generically human, which is to say male, in Western thought.

'I' [*Je*] as a generic feminine subject can *only* enter by force into a language which is foreign to it, for all that is human [*masculine*] is foreign to it, the human not being feminine grammatically speaking but he [*il*] or they [*ils*]. «I» [*Je*] conceals the sexual differences of the verbal persons while specifying them in verbal interchange. 'I' (*Je*) obliterates the fact that *elle* or *elles* are submerged in *il* or *ils*, i.e. that the feminine persons are complementary to the masculine persons. The feminine 'I' [*Je*] who is speaking can fortunately forget this difference and assume indifferently the masculine language. But the 'I' [*Je*] who writes is driven back to her specific experience as subject. The 'I' [*Je*] who writes is alien to her own writing at every word because this 'I' [*Je*] uses a language alien to her, this 'I' [*Je*] experiences what is alien to her since this 'I' [*Je*] cannot be '*un* écrivain'. If, in writing *je*, I adopt this language, this *je* cannot do so. J/e is the symbol of the lived, rending experience which is m/y writing, of this cutting in two which throughout literature is the exercise of a language which does not constitute m/e as subject. J/e poses the ideological and historic question of feminine subjects.⁴

Wittig drew attention to her problem by orthographic splitting; Bachmann's solution is analogous, as we will see.

Moreover, if another writing is necessary to even begin to examine the possibility of the female articulation of subjectivity, it is clear that, for us, another, different, reading will be entailed as

well—as feminist critics, most brilliantly Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, have begun to argue. For, as Gilbert and Gubar point out, what traditional scholarship regards as the strangeness of women's writing may result both from their own difficulty in writing with a male «I» and from the necessity to transform male narrative to fit the forms of female lives.

They [women writers] may have attempted to transcend their anxiety of authorship by *revising* male genres, using them to record their own dreams and their own stories *in disguise*. Such writers, therefore, both participated in and «swerved» from the central sequences of male literary history, enacting a uniquely female process of revision that necessarily caused them to seem «odd.» [W]omen produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsestic, works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible, (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning.

No doubt, many scholarly difficulties with Bachmann's writing result from the attempt to understand it in terms of exactly those categories that Bachmann is trying to subvert. Cited in the center of Bachmann's novel is the Ibsen play which also gives its title to Adrienne Rich's famous essay on female creativity. Rich's essay begins «Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* is a play about the use that the male artist and thinker—in the process of creating culture as we know it—has made of women, in his life and in his work, and about a woman's slow struggling awakening to the use to which her life has been put.» Women in the «*Todesarten*» rarely awaken to an understanding of the male order (though they often cry out in their sleep), but a feminist reading of Bachmann's late works could be part of our awakening. Rich continues:

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history. It is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity. It is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how

we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how can we begin to see and name—and therefore live—afresh '°

This, evidently, is part of Bachmann's purpose in *Malina*

To begin this strange book is already to be put off balance. The «Malina» of the title appears to be the first name of a woman but is identified in the initial cast of characters as the last name of a man (There are in fact plenty of last-name Malinas in the Vienna phone book, yet it is clear that this confusion is intentional.) The *Ich*, whose female identity emerges only slowly, has no name at all, though shares some qualities with Bachmann herself «born in Klagenfurt» (III, 12). But Malina also has some characteristics which, ironically transformed, are reminiscent of Bachmann «Author of an apocrypha which is no longer available in bookstores and of which a few copies were sold in the late fifties» (III, 11). Apocrypha writings of doubtful authenticity or authorship. Malina's occupation puts him in his place once and for all «employed in the Austrian Army Museum» (III, 11), to preside over the relics and mementoes of past wars, of an empire and way of life which has already succumbed to history. (Elsewhere in the novel the *Ich* remarks of Vienna «I am very glad to live here, for from this spot of the world where nothing happens anymore it is much more deeply horrifying to see the world, not self-righteous, not self-satisfied, because this isn't a protected island, but rather there's decline at every spot, it's decline everywhere, with the decline of present and future empires before my eyes» [III, 96].) Though Malina is presented as an independent character and continues to be elaborated as one throughout the novel, it is clear early on that there is something odd about his relationship to the *Ich*.

My relationship to Malina for years consisted of awkward encounters, the hugest misunderstandings and some stupid daydreams—I mean, of much huger misunderstandings than those with other people. It's true that from the beginning I was placed *under* him, and I must have known early that he would be my undoing, that Malina's place was already occupied by Malina before he established himself in my life (III, 17).

Bachman has made clear enough in a number of interviews that Malina is the double of the *Ich* (though, she says, the reader need not necessarily grasp the relationship to appreciate the novel), and that he represents male subjectivity, a position which a woman must occupy, a guise which she must assume, according to the rules of this social order, if she is to possess any subjectivity at all. It does not make sense within a Freudian paradigm to assert, as Walter Helmut Fritz does, that Malina is sometimes a super-ego for the *Ich*,¹² among other things, he is far too nice to her. To be quite clear, Malina is the persona that women must assume when they enter the project world, they must become the genderless (that is to say, male), liberal, bourgeois subject, suppressing their female qualities. Malina is the voice in which Bachmann mostly narrates, the only voice available to professional and academic women, and the voice in which I am writing this essay, a borrowed voice, not our own.

Now, it is apparent that the invention of Malina solves a good many problems for both Bachmann and the *Ich*. In the voice of Malina, Bachmann can narrate the rest of the «*Todesarten*» in a form apparently coherent, realistic, and accessible—as various reviewers remarked with relief of *Simultan*.¹³ If Malina does not break with the categories of the order he depicts, he nonetheless gives account of the tragedies it occasions with kindness and compassion. Bachmann's fondness for her figure is evident in the Kienlechner interview: «There is an important place in the book for me where the «*Ich*» says that Malina is not out for the demasking that we know from literature, that x-ray glance at people which humiliates them, that Malina does not look through people but looks at them, that he's fair to everyone—for otherwise irony can easily lead to diminishing people.»¹⁴ But though Malina moves in the direction of a nineteenth-century narrator, the moral burden of what he has to tell us is none the weaker for that, it is only that we must read the moral out of his narratives. In drafts for the figure of Malina published in the *Werke*, Bachmann makes his moral purpose clear. Observing, for instance, the wreckage of a civilization at the Frankfurt Book Fair, Malina thunders his wrath like an Old Testament prophet:

You hear, I obey an old language and old concepts, I look back like all people who gaze at what has happened and are turned rigid, and perhaps an angel will tell you in time,

don't look back, and then you won't see Frankfurt consumed in smoke and sulphur vapors, as I see it consumed today and twice every year, for vengeance has come Not mine, for I have come to tell and not to judge, but judging haunts all the stories, and crying in the smoke and it ascends to heaven and is told "(III, 552-3)

Malina tells, we judge

For the female *Ich* in Bachmann's novel, Malina is also a convenient figure, a kind of reality principle. He is the one who pays the bills, remembers appointments, keeps her affairs in order. He is also the calm and soothing voice of male reason, who comforts her when she awakens in terror from her nightmares. What would we do without him, especially in the middle of the night? It is foolishness, nonsense, forget it and go back to sleep. (Or, at least as often the voice of a sovereign male reason which, in a sober and distanced way, tries to analyze the psychological motives for the terror which emerges in the dreams «I'm pursuing the matter. Why is your ring missing? Have you ever worn a ring? But you never wear a ring» (III, 220/) Lina, the cleaning lady, who is a further splitting off from Malina, is also a useful figure: she is clean and orderly and can move furniture all by herself, that autonomous, if subservient, super-woman «Men, Madame, we don't need any men for that!» (III, 119)

But there are also disadvantages when a woman assumes a male persona, something like the «double consciousness» of black people which W E B DuBois described: we know who we are seen to be, we know what we assert ourselves to be, we have some idea of who we are—and those are not the same thing. The tension involved in holding together these disparate parts of the personality is difficult to sustain. What a fortune teller reads out of the palm of the *Ich* is no surprise to her.

She said an incredible tension could be read from it at a glance, it really wasn't the picture of one person, but rather of two who contrasted in the most extreme way with each other, I must be constantly rent to pieces, given these aspects, if I'd given her the right dates. I asked politely: the rent man, the rent woman, right? Separately, Mrs. Novak thought, it was livable, but the way it is, hardly, plus the male and the female,

reason and emotion, productivity and self-destruction stood out in a remarkable way I must have been wrong about the dates, for she liked me at once, I was such a natural woman, she likes natural people (III, 248)

Of course she is a natural woman, hanging on despite the fact that this tension has become second nature to us But an even more critical disadvantage to asserting (and believing) ourselves to be generically human and not specifically female is that we have no access to the female side of ourselves Subsumed in the male, we do not attend to it, and cannot tell about it It is in good part because Malina exists, as a dimension of the *Ich* to which she clings, that she has no narrative voice, as she sometimes recognizes «Malina interrupts me, he protects me, but I believe that his protectiveness leads to my never being able to tell my story It is Malina who keeps me from telling my story» (III, 265) As in Christa Wolf's story «Selbstversuch,» for women to become men seems the most obvious solution to centuries of women's oppression But it may also mean that women lose what is most important to them

Yet to demonize men as somehow ontologically incompatible with the female is also too easy a solution As it has been the burden of deconstruction to show, male subjectivity is not altogether unproblematic or identical with itself, either How much more this must then be the case of a male subjectivity assumed by a woman! Examined more closely, Malina himself is also a suspicious figure, perhaps it's for this reason that he can narrate the »*Todesarten*« at all As Rainer Nägele has pointed out, «Shuffled anew, the letters of the name produce an ANIMAL which, if you cut off its tail, spiritualizes itself into an ANIMA »¹⁶ An «animal» is hidden in Malina, a metaphor which Bachmann also pursued in her short story «Das Gebell,» where the old woman finally rebelling in her senility against her tyrannical son is overwhelmed by the imaginary barking of the dog her son had hated (It is also interesting that, in her loving topography of Vienna's Third District, the one large landmark the *Ich* suppresses is the Tierärztliche Hochschule, right around the corner from the Ungargasse) Malina also has a female double in the novel, Maria Malina, a Viennese actress much more famous than he, her male name combining the two most popular stereotypes about women, sainthood plus carnality Maria Animal In the drafts for the Malina figure, Maria Malina, «who on stage was a dream, an animal,» is

revealed—by a male narrator—to be «unassuming» in real life «a vehemence, a silence, a sob, a smile, those stooped shoulders and big feet and her nose was rather thick, she didn't have make-up on, she had a bad complexion and too thick a nose, and she wasn't thin and wasn't fat, a medium-sized body, not unrobust, and her hair was greasy, stringy, dishwater blond, that was the Malina woman » (III, 534) A woman must be a consummate artist to meet men's expectations of her, and her reality is bound to disappoint them Maria Malina is eaten by a shark at age thirty-four—or this, at least was the report given by the man with whom she had travelled to Greece, the only witness to her death Malina has experienced 'Todesarten,' too

The *Ich*'s first encounter with Malina is also an interesting allusion to his lack of self-identity and to the possibility of suppressed psychic qualities emerging into male bourgeois consciousness which could destroy all its achievements If Bachmann's name itself reveals the split personality to which *Malina* gives expression, the «Bach,» fluidity of the female, channelled by the masculine, «Mann,» it is a «Mann»—Thomas—whose themes *Malina* varies in displaying its own problems with a threatened and dying society to which no alternative seems to offer itself The *Ich* first glimpses Malina in a scene which draws upon the experiences of Gustav von Aschenbach (who shares a portion of Bachmann's name and combines the fire and water motifs that trace their way through *Malina*) she waits for a streetcar on the edge of a park (the Stadtpark, which, as I will show later, represents the allure and threat of psychic non-differentiation), boards, and looks about for Malina, who has vanished But of course the figures are reversed here it is Malina who represents the firm male ego boundaries which will be confirmed at the end of this work, though dissolved at the end of Mann's Malina is first observed with a newspaper in his hand he has the access to the language of social communication (here somewhat debased) which Aschenbach also possesses and which is lacking this female *Ich* Moreover, this *Ich* will never even make it to Venice Though it represents as for Aschenbach the promise of sensual fulfillment, the *Ich* must experience it as distinct and separate from herself, in the «movie theater behind the Kärntnerring in which I saw Venice for the first time, immersed in colors and in much darkness, the strokes of the oars into the water, a music moved with lights through the water, and its dadim, dadam drew me along over into the figures, the double figures and their

dance steps. Thus had I come to the Venice that I will never see, on a windy, rattling winter day in Vienna» (III, 26). Of yet more central importance to *Malina* is the opposition which is central to Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, of Beethoven and Schönberg. If Adrian Leverkühn's masterwork, «Fausti Weheklage,» is written to rescind Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, to remand that joyful affirmation of a social order, Bachmann's «Todesarten» aim at the same intention. Across from the house where this silenced female *Ich* lives, Ungargasse 6, is Ungargasse 5, the Beethovenhaus, where the deaf Beethoven wrote his Ninth Symphony. Yet the central musical composition whose thematics shape Bachmann's work is by the figure whom Mann construed as Beethoven's negation, Schönberg. But as I will explain in more detail below, the Schönberg work, «Pierrot lunaire,» on which *Malina* draws, not only negates current cultural categories like Leverkühn's composition but also hints simultaneously at some other, utopian possibilities for human happiness.

By far the most intriguing indication that *Malina* is more than he appears to be is found here in a reference to the work of Bachmann's admirer Christa Wolf, whose work circles about many of the same themes as Bachmann's own. In *Nachdenken über Christa T*, the one extended narrative which Christa T, that thwarted and utopian figure, is able to write is entitled «Malina, die Himbeere,» and involves a journey of a thirteen-year-old girl to Kalisch, then (in 1940) a district of Russian Poland occupied by the Nazis. The young narrator insists she is travelling to a foreign country, though her mother maintains it is German. The story breaks off with their arrival in Kalisch. «Now one ought to know why she stopped at this point, the narrator of *Christa T* continues. What was to be the outcome of the Polish strawberry [*sic* *Himbeer*=raspberry]—Malina—for which she had raised the whole magic structure, with Brockhaus 1889, the journey to a foreign country which wasn't any such journey, her mother and herself, talking and replying. you asked what testimony I've got. Well, the tone of these pages of hers, for example. She speaks so you can see her. 'To speak about and across borders which are not physical ones is a task of female writing, especially in a land occupied by a foreign invader, one whom Bachmann might even be inclined to define more precisely as fascist, as in Wolf's work. ' Christa T couldn't write either, even the story «Malina» is unfinished, and she laments «the difficulty of saying I.» Nevertheless,

in Wittgensteinian terms, Christa T. does venture to cross some borders, and both the *Ich* of *Malina* and Malina himself come from the border, where the rigid boundaries each language sets become softened a little. This pressure on the limits of language is one of the themes and strengths of Bachmann's novel.

Yet perhaps this discussion of *Malina* has been somewhat misleading, for *Malina* is not, strictly speaking, whom the novel is about. The other and more overtly tyrannical figure in relationship to whom the *Ich* constitutes herself is Ivan, her lover, and it is this relationship which structures the novel. After a short introductory section, the first longer portion of the novel is called «Glücklich mit Ivan» and gives an account of their love affair. The middle section, «Der dritte Mann,» consists mainly of the *Ich*'s dreams of persecution, in which her father plays the major role. In the third section with its apocalyptic title «Von letzten Dingen,» the relationship with Ivan trails off and the disappearance of the *Ich* is prepared. As Bachmann pointed out in an interview, Ivan is also probably a kind of double for the *Ich*,¹⁹ which is to say, he also resides in the female psyche: he represents the tyranny of romantic love, of compulsory heterosexuality, whose laws women accept and interiorize. Like other lovers in Bachmann's works, Jan in *Der gute Gott von Manhattan* and «You monsters called Hans!» (II, 253) in «Undine geht,» Ivan is a «john,» a more or less interchangeable male lover. That is why, unlike *Malina* and the *Ich*, he is a signifier identical with his signified, or perhaps more accurately, a signifier without a signified, as the *Ich* remarks: «*Malina* and I have, for all our differences, the same shyness about our names, only Ivan is completely subsumed in his name.» (III, 86) For the same reason Bachmann could assert in an interview (though what she says is not quite true), «We never learn what did Ivan do before, what will he do later, what's going to happen at all, who is this man?»²⁰ In the final section of the novel, Bachmann makes extremely clear that for women loving a john is a far from idyllic or utopian experience, nor does it allow women the exploration and elaboration of their own sensuality and eroticism. Men make love as suits their tastes, and their female partners must arrange themselves as best they can.

People are happy sometimes, but certainly most women are never happy. What I mean has nothing to do with the fact that there are supposed to be a few good lovers, for there aren't any. That's a legend that ought to be destroyed some-

day, at best there are men with whom it's completely hopeless and a few with whom it isn't quite so hopeless. That's where the reason should be sought which nobody's looked for yet, why only women always have their heads full of their feelings and their stories with their man or their men. Thinking about it really does take up most of every woman's time. But she has to think about it because otherwise, without her never tiring emotional activity, emotional ferment, she literally could never stand it with a man who after all is sick and scarcely concerns himself with her.

«A Legend» «literally»—love is an elaborate symbolic system, a game or dance, the responsibility for which falls on women, who nevertheless do not expect their sick male lovers to make them happy.

This illness leads to the heart of Bachmann's argument: all men are sick, and all women must come to terms with these diseased gender arrangements. «one could say that the whole attitude of a man towards a woman is sick and moreover sick in a very particular way, so that one will never be able to free men from their sicknesses. Of women one could at best say that they are more or less marked by the contagious infections that they contract, by their sympathy with the malady» (III, 269). It is this sickness which Bachmann's «*Todesarten*» are directed at revealing, as she has made quite clear in interviews. Thus, asked of *Malina*, «Then one should understand it as a document of contemporary existence, of human beings who are themselves destroyed by this destruction—as one of their ways of death?» «she replied,» Yes, there is a correspondence between their sickness and the sickness of the world and the society.»²¹ A closer examination of the love between Ivan and the *Ich* will reveal the far-reaching implications of this sickness.

It is important to notice the absences in this love affair. Love itself is rarely mentioned, never do they say «I love you.» Sex is never discussed and barely alluded to: this is not a relationship where a female subject discovers her *jouissance*. Even at the level of realism, this is obviously a miserable relationship, with the *Ich* steadfastly refusing to concede her own unhappiness, yet I would suspect that for most women this «Hörigkeit» is quite convincing: of course she will not break with him, for she loves him. Or one might formulate this somewhat differently: Ivan is the presence

that makes it possible to constitute reality, a «fix» which must be renewed for it to have its effect on her

I think of Ivan
 I think of love
 Of the injections of reality
 Of their duration, only so few hours
 Of the next, the stronger injection (III, 45)

For her, Ivan is «my Mecca and my Jerusalem» (III, 43), «Everything is of the brand of Ivan, of the house of Ivan» (III, 30). In this relationship the *Ich* is thoroughly female «But, young lady, we are very feminine» (III, 140), says Ivan. But this is a femininity socially defined, offering her no more access to an authentic female voice than the assumption of Malina's male subjectivity. Ivan is a father with two children, but he is «the Only Begetter» (III, 95), the mother does not exist in this story. The children's names suggest some relationship to the original differentiation which makes language possible. Belá, Andras, b-a. But Ivan has accomplished this on his own, while the woman is absent and unnamed. The *Ich* regards Ivan's function for her to be the assurance of her entry into language «For he has come to make the consonants firm and palpable again, to open the vowels again so that they sound fully, to allow words to emerge from my lips again, to reestablish the first, destroyed coherencies and to solve the problems, and so I will budge not an iota from him » (III, 32). Yet the language Ivan gives her to speak is one in which women are permitted to exist only in relationship to men and have no independent voice of their own at all.

Ivan places a variety of limits on the *Ich*'s right and ability to speak. The most frequent conversations reported between them are telephone calls (a «Verbindung,» connection, facilitated by the cord, always impossibly tangled, which connects her to him). At their best, the calls are banal and boring, mis-communication—the *Ich* running gasping and desperate to answer the telephone, then maintaining, in a futile endeavor to protect herself from him, that she really has no time to talk.²² Usually the telephone conversations reported are not even complete sentences, completely inadequate vehicles for conveying her emotions, precodified sets of propositions «example sentences» «fatigue sentences,» «curse sentences.» By the time we arrive at that last, ominous set of sentences, the self-

deception in the *Ich*'s assertion that she is «glücklich mit Ivan» is quite clear, for he directs the terms at her which men have often used to express their terror and loathing of women «Witch,» «slut,» «carrion » But Ivan insists that she nonetheless proclaim her happiness with him, in the language that it is given her to speak, all is well between men and women (All the books in the *Ich*'s huge library don't help her deal with Ivan—those books are written by men. The one book she needs is missing: a cookbook.) Ivan explicitly forbids her to continue writing the drafts of the «*Todesarten*» he has found in her apartment.

I have left a few pages on the chair. He picks up another and reads with amusement *Ways of Death*. And from another scrap of paper he reads the *Egyptian Darkness* [a section of *Der Fall Franza*]. Isn't that your handwriting, didn't you write that? As I don't answer, Ivan says, I don't like that, I suspected as much, and all these books lying around here in this tomb, nobody wants them, why are there books like them, there should be other ones too, ones like EXSULTATE JUBILATE, so that people can jump out of their skins for joy, you often jump out of your skin for joy, so why don't you write that way (III, 54).

And the *Ich* vows obediently henceforth to rejoice in and write about the bliss which this affair has brought her. «Ivan said to me: You probably have figured that out. I love nobody. The children, obviously, but nobody else. I nod, although I didn't know it and Ivan finds it obvious that I too find it obvious. JUBILATE. Hanging over an abyss, I nonetheless recall how it is supposed to begin EXSULTATE» (III, 58). This «*Todesart*» can't be written either.

Since the *Ich* accepts the rules for entry into the symbolic order of compulsory heterosexuality, she constitutes herself according to the social rules of femininity even away from Ivan. There is great and painful irony in the scene in which the *Ich*, on her own, «fabulously distant from men,» nonetheless recreates herself as the woman the fashion industry has told her to become.

A composition comes into being, a woman must be created for an at-home outfit. In deep secrecy is planned again what a woman is, it's something completely primeval, with an aura for no one. The hair has to be brushed twenty times, the feet

rubbed with body lotion and the toenails polished, the hair on the legs and in the armpits has to be removed, the shower is turned on and off, a cloud of body powder rises in the bathroom, the mirror is gazed into, it is always Sunday, the mirror is interrogated, on the wall, it could be Sunday already (III, 136)

The natural, independent woman painted, powdered, dehaired, self-created as an image for the mirror on the wall, of which a woman asks—naturally?—«Who is the fairest of them all?» As John Berger argues, since women are born into a world which men control, they are constrained to become the observers of themselves, for how they appear determines how men will treat them. Women interiorize this doubleness and constitute themselves as comprising both «surveyor and surveyed» «The surveyor of woman in herself is male the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision a sight»²³ Or one might theorize this scene as Susan Gubar does: such female narcissism exists for lack of other expressive possibilities. Without language, female creativity is expressed through the female body itself—though still within a referential system which pre-defines what those possibilities for creativity may be.²⁴

The *Ich* thus suffers from the dis-ease of misrepresentation—though it's the only representation she's got. We are warned not to believe anything she maintains about herself. It's clearly not the case that Ivan (or Ivan plus Malina) provides the solution to all her problems, nor is, contrary to her assertions, the Ungargasse the home for which she has longed. For a reader sensitized to issues of sexual politics, the irony in the following passage is very strong.

Here [between Ungargasse 6 and 9] the trembling nervousness, the high tension which lies over the city and presumably everywhere, is almost put to rest, and the schizothymia, the schizoid quality of the world, its insane, widening split closes unnoticeably. The only excitement is a hurried search for hair pins and stockings, a mild trembling while putting on mascara and applying eye shadow, while using the thin brushes for eyeliner, while dipping the airy cotton balls into light and dark powder (III, 31)

Of course it is precisely this crack in the world into which *she* disappears at the end, the Ungargasse is not a refuge for her after all.²⁵ Before meeting Malina and Ivan, the *Ich* had lived in the Beatrixgasse, where she, if, à la Dante, participating in the male order, nonetheless preserved a certain virginal inaccessibility. Now she has moved around the corner to the Ungargasse, which derives its name from the penetration of foreigners into Vienna. Malina lives at 6, Ivan at 9, two men, simply inversions of one another, not different in quality. The *Ich* is un-gar, unfinished, undone. Neither of these male voices permits her to express herself at all.

Yet this isn't the complete story on the *Ich* (if it were, we'd have a different text: a female *Bildungsroman*, perhaps, or a Gothic love story). It is to her credit that, despite Ivan's urgings, she is not happy; she is not totally subsumed in the ideology of romantic love through which her identity had been constituted and does not write that book EXSULTATE JUBILATE. Her story speaks through her unhappiness, a sickness which moves towards madness. One is reminded of the statement by S. Weir Mitchell, cited as an epigraph to the second chapter of Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*: «The man who does not know sick women does not know women».²⁶ It was, after all, his patient, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose protagonist in *The Yellow Wallpaper* also tries to disappear into the wall because her doctor, based on Weir Mitchell, had forbidden her to write. But what it is important to emphasize here is that the other story of the *Ich* can't be told: there is no language which this story can be told in. Like the female schizophrenics whom Luce Irigaray studied, there is no metalanguage for this dis-ease. «A woman in a state of madness does not have, for some reason, the means for elaborating a delirium. Instead of language being the medium of expression of the delirium, the latter remains within the body itself. The dominant element in feminine schizophrenia is corporal pain, the feeling of deformation or transformation of organs, etc.»²⁷ Repressed, it must struggle to speak in spite of the proscriptions upon expression, here not so much through symptoms of the body (though this is the case elsewhere in Bachmann, for instance in «Ihr glücklichen Augen») as in the dreams and parapraxes which Freud indicated to be the signifying material of the repressed. But there is no coherent narrative of the *Ich* to argue that there is would be to recuperate her own distress and misunderstand Bachmann's novel. Instead, we need to look for places where the *Ich* mis-writes herself, «sich

verschreibt,» as Bachmann puts it ²⁸ At best, we can indicate some areas in which that which she cannot say tries nonetheless to speak

The narrative structure of the book itself is one of those places The central thematic concern structuring the traditional novel, the relationship of the individual to the social world, is the one that's missing here, except for one short, funny examination of the vacation habits of the Viennese upper crust (So inclined, Bachmann can write social satire with the best of realist novelists But there's an ominous undertone even here, it's hinted that the brilliant articulate women who oversee these social games have their dark side, too «To Antoinette every man is a complete riddle» (III, 160), «What do you have to say about Christine's hysteria» (III, 162)) If the lack of coherent plot development or even of an identifiable narrative stance has been responsible for some of reviewers' and scholars' problems with the book, it's also an assertion of the lack of coherence available to the *Ich* It's interesting, too, that this is the area of the novel which Bachmann identified as closest to experimental writing proper «What I regard as experiments with prose the reader isn't bothered with, for my experiments land in the waste basket—although I certainly need them But I don't believe they're there to be published In this novel, which isn't a seamless narrative—it isn't that at all—there are quite different elements, from the dreams to the dialogue to the musical score-like ending—I call those a no longer visible experiment with narrative possibilities »²⁹ But one might also regard these failure of the text to constitute a seamless narrative, and even those opaque and mysterious allusions which remain resistant to interpretation, as a utopian hint—though only a hint—in the direction of another, less oppressive discourse which feminists could make use of In this reading of the text we might explore Bachmann's suggestion with respect to the complexity of her novel, «how interconnected it is, so that there's almost no sentence which doesn't refer to another one »³⁰ This might be a logic of association and «both/and» rather than of causality and «either/or » This might be a subjectivity which does not do violence to itself by asserting its self-identity but concedes its disunity and nonsynchrony For, without, one hastens to add, giving up on reason altogether, a feminist voice, however it finally constitutes itself, will need to admit that which the binary oppositions of logocentricity haven't wished to permit within present patriarchal discourse ³¹

«But it's in the night and alone that the erratic monologues

come about, and they remain, for a human being is a dark creature, he is only master of himself in the darkness and by day he returns to slavery» (III, 101) Most clearly we discover that which the *Ich* can't say in the middle, dream section of the novel Bachmann told Kienlechner, «We learn nothing about the life of this *I* or about what's happened to her—that's all in the dreams, partially concealed and partially expressed Every conceivable kind of torture, destruction, harassment »³² As these are dreams, even though literary ones, we cannot expect to be able to interpret them completely, indeed, as Freud cautioned, «We must not concern ourselves with what the dream *appears* to tell us, whether it is intelligible or absurd, clear or confused, since it cannot possibly be the unconscious material we are in search of »³³ Nonetheless, as Bachmann suggests, not everything is concealed here, and some themes emerge which help us to understand the constraints of consciousness The most obvious common element of these varied dreams is the father figure, who emerges again and again as the *Ich*'s persecutor and tormentor Bachmann has stated explicitly that this omnipotent father is the figure who is responsible for the *Ich*'s destruction, her «murder»

All the stories which are not included here because the *Ich* is not permitted to tell anything about herself—for her Doppelgänger forbids her to—they appear in the dreams, for instance the explanation for her destruction, for her almost having been annihilated by a prehistory brought about by the overpowerful father figure, about whom we discover that this figure is the murderer, and more precisely, the murderer whom we all have ³⁴

This is a patriarchal, an Oedipal tragedy which strikes all of us Under threat of the most terrible of punishments, the deprivation of our sexuality, we submit ourselves to the Law of the Father which spells death to an independent desire expressing itself outside of socially prescribed channels

From the first dream, from which I have borrowed the title of this essay, the crime for which the father is responsible emerges its setting is «the cemetery of the murdered daughters» (III, 175), and he is the perpetrator of the «Todesarten » Murder (along with lesser offenses) is accomplished in the greatest variety of ways In the second dream she is gassed in a gas chamber, later she is

transported to Siberia with other Jews (more substantiation for Bachmann's association of patriarchy and fascism) She is frozen in ice and plunged into fire, subjected to electroshock, buried under an avalanche, electrocuted, and eaten by a crocodile With yet clearer symbolism her dreams frequently refer to her incest with her father, a connection she regards with abhorrence, though Melanie, a recurrent figure who, analogous to Malina, is another of her doubles, is pleased enough at the advantages of the relationship «Mela-Nie,» thinks the *Ich* Her mother, who sometimes allies with the father, is a dog, «who devotedly lets herself be beaten» (III, 189) Her father directs an opera «My father went to the theater God is a performance/conception (III, 181),» in which she is prepared to sing a duet with a young man, yet she recognizes «that in the duet only his voice could be heard anyway, because my father wrote the voice for him alone and naturally nothing for me, because I don't have any training and am only supposed to be displayed» (III, 188-9) In various ways he denies her speech he will not permit delivery of letters to her friends and tries to gain control of the sentences dried on her tongue as she dies of thirst But what is constant in these dreams is her resistance to her father and her refusal to be murdered «Sometimes my voice abandons me I allowed myself to live nonetheless Sometimes my voice comes and can be heard by everyone I live, I will live, I take my right to my life» (III, 231) By the end of these dreams, the *Ich* (with Malina's help) has understood that despite the apparently harmless ball scene from *War and Peace* which recurs in her dreams, what she has experienced here is only war, and the section concludes with this recognition

Malina So you will never again say War and Peace
Ich Never again
 It is always war
 Here there is always violence
 Here there is always struggle
 It is eternal war (III, 236)

If «der dritte Mann»—the title of this section—prevents her self-articulation like the other two, the *Ich* is at least left with the possibility of refusing their definition of her «In another language I say Ne! Ne! And in many languages Nein! Nein! Non! Non! Njet! Njet! No! Nem! Nem! No! For in our language, too, I can

only say no, otherwise I find no other word in a language» (III, 176-7)

The *Ich*'s waking life is also informed by a desire to write, to articulate herself, which cannot be fulfilled. Interspersed through the first and third sections of the book are letters by the *Ich* which represent her attempt to take up the pen. They are mostly written «in utmost fear and greatest haste,» a recurrent phrase which also characterizes, the *Ich* had reported in the introduction, the unity of time—«Today»—in which she is compelled to live. If the letters are completed at all, they are signed «an unknown.» At the beginning of the novel's third section the *Ich* explains that these mysterious and cryptic letters are connected to her experience of a postal crisis concerned with the mature of the «privacy of the mail (literally letter secret)» Her own meditations on the «privacy of mail» and the unmailed letters mostly written deep in the night are released by the case of the letter carrier Otto Kranewitzer in Klagenfurt who, suddenly struck by the enormity of his postal duties, was no longer able to deliver the mail. For this crisis, the *Ich* asserts, is one with immense existential and ontological implications.

After the Kranewitzer case I burned my mail of many years, afterwards I began to write quite different letters, mostly late at night, until eight in the morning. But it's these letters, none of which I sent, which matter to me. In these four or five years I must have written around ten thousand letters, for me alone, in which there was everything. I also don't open many letters. I try to practice the letter secret, to bring myself to the height of this thought of Kranewitzer's, to grasp what is impermissible about reading a letter. (III, 243)

No doubt the «privacy of mail» is illuminated by a multilingual pun, the overlapping of the two meanings of letter/lettre in English and French. For the *Ich* had betrayed the secret earlier in the book to her baffled and frustrated interviewer Herr Mühlbauer, «I will reveal a frightful secret to you: language is the punishment» (III, 97).

Nonetheless, there are moments at which, despite herself, that which the *Ich* is forbidden to say breaks through into her waking language as well. The *Ich* recognizes (and tips us off to) the parapraxes which allow the repressed to emerge in this book. «Then I also began to read everything I read in a distorted way

When 'summer fashions' was printed somewhere I read 'summer murders' That's only one example I could give you hundreds» (III, 209) Thus, it seems, we are also to look at the language of this book for that which is not supposed to be there Reading closely, one can find, below the apparent narrative, some subterranean themes which tell a different story than the one the *Ich* intends The «Pierrot lunaire» motif to which I have already referred is one of these The first line from the last poem of the cycle which recurs through *Malina*—«O old fragrance from fairy tale times»—points in the direction of archaic reminiscences which the *Ich* has repressed and to which she now barely has access, having constituted herself in a different time, a present, «Today,» «a word that only people who commit suicide (of which, it appears, she is one) should be permitted to use» (III, 15) (The dreams in contrast deny synchronism altogether «The time is not today Time doesn't exist any more at all, for it could have been yesterday, a long time ago, it could be again, could be constantly, some of it never was » [III, 174] Yet it seems that the *Ich* is able to resist these men at all only because of her archaic reminiscences of an original satisfaction now denied The *Ich* first hears her Schönberg song sung by a «chalkwhite Pierrot with a squeaky voice» (III, 15) in the Stadtpark, to which neither Ivan nor *Malina* wish to accompany her and of which she herself is afraid, for it is a place of «shadows and dark figures» (III, 137), that is, a site of night and dreams «the human being is only master of himself in the darkness » The Stadtpark also seems to be the site of an original polymorphous perversity where in the immediate postwar period illicit sex of all varieties took place «There can scarcely have been anyone who didn't encounter every man with every woman there» (III, 289) For the *Ich*, the Stadtpark is associated as well with water and with the fear of drowning, from which her men in the Ungargasse save her

I am in safety again, no longer near the nocturnal city park, hurrying past house walls, no longer on the detour in the darkness, but already a little at home, on the plank of the Ungargasse, my head saved in Ungargasse-land, with my neck out of the water a little, too Already gurgling the first words and sentences, already beginning, already starting (III, 138)

The *Ich* flees water, which may suggest to her the «oceanic feeling» before psychic differentiation and the more fluid ego boundaries of

the female. Instead, she's chosen to associate herself with Malina, whom she imagines to be a phallic hero creating order out of watery chaos, allowing, so the legend has it, Klagenfurt (a ford of lamentations?) to arise from suspiciously female swamps, Klagenfurt, the city where she was born. «But I most liked to let him be Saint George, who killed the dragon so that Klagenfurt could arise, from the great swamp in which nothing grows, so that my first city could come out of it » (III, 21). Yet the «Pierrot lunaire» motif recurs throughout the novel in the Beatrixgasse, at a moment of despair in Vienna society, as a reprise at the end of the novel before the *Ich* vanishes into the wall. That old fragrance wafts a promise of happiness which can't be completely forgotten.

Perhaps this can help us understand the one extended narrative, running in italics through *Malina*, which the *Ich* seems to have written, the story of the Prinzessin von Kagrau which anticipates her love affair with Ivan. The princess comes from a region near the Danube where St. George had also triumphed over the floods. When she has to decide between the floods and the fearsome willows, she allows herself to be rescued by the stranger in the dark coat who prefigures Ivan. What other possibilities did she have, what other narrative could she have written? She has to tell *this* story: there is no other way for her to imagine the satisfaction of her desire. But this does not mean that her utopian vision is altogether wrong, only that it must be channelled into the language which is given her to speak. The transformation she longs for is a vision of «luxe, calme et volupté» which nonetheless draws upon her own specifically female desire. Bernd Witte has argued this most persuasively:

Attached to the fairy tale, also characterized externally as connected by the same italics, are further fragments of a vision of a perfect society in later portions of the first chapter. «A day will come on which women have golden red eyes, golden red hair, and the poetry of their sex will be created again » The return of the golden age here emanates quite obviously from women. Only several pages later, when this sentence is repeated, is the word «women» replaced by, «people,» while the arrival of paradise is linked to the condition that «their hands will be gifted for love »³⁵

Counterposed to and subversive of *Malina's* patriarchal subsump-

tion of women is a feminist utopia of sensual pleasure and erotic joy. It is from this narrative that Bachmann herself read when asked for her own vision of utopia:

A day will come on which people have golden black eyes, they will see beauty, they will be freed of dirt and of every burden, they will raise themselves into the air, they will go under water, they will forget their welts and their distresses. A day will come, they will be free, all people will be free, also of the freedom in which they believed. There will be a greater freedom, it will be beyond bounds, it will be for a whole life.³⁶

Now, what are feminists to make of this? The vision is beautiful, but scarcely realizable, the patriarchal reality, terrifyingly familiar and concrete. The *Ich*'s story of Marcel, a clochard of Paris (and, it seems, a compatriot of Proust) comes to mind: like the *Ich*, he is one of the «injured,» and he simply dies when a well-meaning social-worker tries to redeem him «for a new life which doesn't exist» (III, 283). As Myra Love once remarked to me, Bachmann lacked the context. But we might also derive some comfort and assistance from the *Ich*'s single vow. Having passed the Rigorosum of the University of Vienna, she swears upon its staff, and armed with this knowledge, triumphs over both the waters and her father's might: «And with a handful of sand which is my knowledge I go over the water, and my father cannot follow me» (III, 187). Perhaps we need not, like Leda, put on patriarchal knowledge with his power. Perhaps there is another and more liberating use to make of knowledge, perhaps, from within the cemetery of the murdered daughters: men's knowledge can be turned against them. Bachmann is neither the *Ich* nor Malina, she found a language to write the story of women without language. We know this now: «A woman who completely expresses herself has not done away with herself,» wrote Christa Wolf of Bachmann in her recent Büchner-Preis-Rede, «the wish to do away with herself remains as a witness. Her part will not be lost.»³⁷

NOTES

1 Ingeborg Bachmann *Der Fall Franza* in *Werke* ed Christine Koschel, Inge von Weidenbaum and Clemens Münster (Munich and Zurich R Piper & Co Verlag 1978) III, 436 All further references to Bachmann's works will be taken from this edition and cited with volume and page number in the text Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own

2 Toni Kienlechner «Gespräch mit Ingeborg Bachmann» *Die Brücke* 1, No 1 (Spring 1975) 102

3 Kienlechner, *Gespräch* p 104

4 Kienlechner *Gespräch* p 102

5 Marcel Reich Ranicki, «Tageslicht statt Aureolen Zu einem Fernsehfilm über Ingeborg Bachmann» *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 16 September 1980

6 Bernd Witté, «Ingeborg Bachmann,» *Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* 6 Nachlieferung (October 1980)

7 See the interview with Ekkehart Rudolph, *Aussage zur Person Zwölf deutsche Schriftsteller im Gespräch mit Ekkehart Rudolph* (Tübingen and Basel Horst Erdmann Verlag 1977), p 15

8 Monique Wittig *The Lesbian Body* trans David LeVay (New York Avon Books, 1975), p x According to Marilyn Schuster of Smith College this author's note does not appear in the French edition and seems to have been written for the English translation

9 Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar *The Madwoman in the Attic The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London Yale University Press), p 73

10 Adrienne Rich, «When We Dead Awaken Writing as Re Vision (1971),» in *On Lies Secrets and Silence Selected Prose 1966 1978* (New York W W Norton & Company, 1979), pp 34 35

11 For a full discussion of the various ways this relationship is presented in the novel see Ellen Summerfield, *Ingeborg Bachmann Die Auflösung der Figur in ihrem Roman Malina* » *Studien zur Germanistik Anglistik und Komparatistik*, Bd 40 (Bonn Bouvier Verlag, Herbert Grundmann 1976)

12 Walter Helmut Fritz «Über Ingeborg Bachmanns Roman 'Malina, » *Text und Kritik (Ingeborg Bachmann)* No 6 (May 1976) p 24

13 See, for instance, Sibylle Wirsing's review of *Simultan Neue Deutsche Hefte* 19, No 4, Heft 136 (1972) 149 151

14 Kienlechner *Gespräch* p 103

15 In the Proust essay and in her story «Ein Schritt nach Gomorrah,» Bachmann uses the Sodom and Gomorrah motif positively as the attempt to establish a new order by breaking the sexual taboos against homosexuality But of course Malina,

who belongs to the old order could understand Sodom and Gomorrah only as the destruction of one civilization, not as the simultaneous attempt to construct a new one

16 Rainer Nägele «Die Arbeit des Textes Notizen zur experimentellen Literatur » in *Deutsche Literatur in der Bundesrepublik seit 1965* ed P M Lützeler and E Schwärz (Königstein Athenäum, 1980) p 38

17 Christa Wolf *The Quest for Christa T* trans Christopher Middleton (New York Farrar Straus and Girous, 1970) p 90

18 In an interview given in Poland Bachmann maintained that the Italians had recognized that the central theme of *Malina* was fascism Fascism in its relationship to the destruction of women is also an explicit theme of *Der Fall Franza* Clearly Bachmann means by «fascism» something more than the socio political systems of Italy and Germany in the period leading to the Second World War It might be useful to examine Bachmann's conception of the male and female psyche using the frame of analysis which Klaus Theweleit advances in *Männerphantasien*

19 Rudolph, *Aussage zur Person* p 22

20 Rudolph, *Aussage zur Person* p 23

21 Kienlechner *Gespräch* p 104

22 Some feminist should investigate the gender specificity of people's relationship to the telephone A good start would be Dorothy Parker's «A Telephone Call » The central female figure there waits as desperately for her male lover to call as Bachmann's *Ich* does

23 John Berger *Ways of Seeing* (London British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972) p 47

24 Susan Gubar, «'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity,» forthcoming in *Critical Inquiry*

25 In the stories of *Simultan* Bachmann is much more obvious in her use of city locales which are intended to be understood both realistically and metaphorically, for instance the Blutgasse, in «Ihr glücklichen Augen» or the hairdresser René in «Probleme Probleme » The central female character in «Probleme Probleme» is a narcissistic demi vierge named Beatrix

26 Gilbert and Gubar *The Madwoman in the Attic* p 45

27 Luce Irigaray, «Women's Exile,» *Ideology & Consciousness* No 1 (May 1977), p 74

28 Kienlechner, *Gespräch* p 102

29 Kienlechner, *Gespräch* p 102

30 Kienlechner, *Gespräch* p 98

31 For a remarkably interesting discussion of this subversive other discourse see Julia Kristeva *Desire in Language A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* ed Leon S Roudiez (New York Columbia University Press, 1980)

32 Kienlechner, *Gespräch* p 102

- 33 Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* trans and ed James Strachey (New York W W Norton & Company Inc , 1966), p 114
- 34 Rudolph, *Aussage zur Person* p 23
- 35 Witte, «Ingeborg Bachmann,» p 11
- 36 Rudolph, *Aussage zur Person* p 27
- 37 Christa Wolf *Büchner Preis Rede 1980* Sonderdruck für die Freunde des Luchterhand Verlages p 12

**QUOTATION AND LITERARY ECHO AS
STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLES IN
GABRIELE WOHMANN'S
*FRUHHERBST IN BADENWEILER***

WALTER H. SOKEL
University of Virginia

Gabriele Wohmann's novel, *Fruhherbst in Badenweiler*, (*Early Autumn in Badenweiler*) (1978), is unusually interesting for at least three reasons. First, it is one of the most delightfully ironic depictions of the so-called New Inwardness (*Neue Innerlichkeit*) of recent German literary and intellectual life. Second, it reaches back in a most striking and successful manner to a long-past period of modernist literature to which the term Alexandrian (or, in Gottfried Benn's version, «Ptolemaic») applies. Nourished by encyclopaedic erudition, this literature thrived on a pessimistic conviction that one belonged to the terminal phase of Western civilization, and utilized quotations, allusions, and cultural-historical references to fashion its ironic vision of modern man. Third, with the montage technique inherited from these «classics of modernism,» Gabriele Wohmann sketches the contemporary artist-intellectual's dilemma in the German Federal Republic of the seventies.

New Inwardness is usually seen as a decided reaction against the socially engaged literature of the sixties and early seventies. If so, Gabriele Wohmann had been its representative all along, long before the cliché was heard of. However, not until her great novel, *Schönes Gehege* (1975), did New Inwardness become programmatic and problematic in her work. The protagonist of *Schönes Gehege*, the writer Math, protests the socialization and commercialization of the artist, and resists his submission to the media. In the following novel, *Fruhherbst in Badenweiler*, Gabriele

Wohmann begins where she left off in *Schönes Gehege*. In this novel she presents New Inwardness in all its aspects, and at the same time satirizes and transcends it.

Badenweiler, a magically idyllic spa situated near the Swiss border between Black Forest and Rhine, caters to those elderly who can afford to be served. Finding himself on the threshold of the male «climacteric,» the composer Hubert Frey chooses Badenweiler as a refuge from contemporary life and its insistence on perpetual youth. He feels in need of a «vacation» from its dynamism. In the patinaed haute bourgeois Park Hotel, time appears to have stopped somewhere in the nineteenth century. Here he hopes to find peace and comfort. «That everything here is so historical seems to me to be another important ingredient of the Badenweiler atmosphere. It makes me feel that I am not superfluous» (173).¹ At the same time, to be sure, he notes with some relief that «the policy of preserving the past which guides the decor of the rooms does not include the sanitary locales» (187).

In him New Inwardness appears as a New Conservatism, which looks back with nostalgia to the period of post-Napoleonic restoration in Central Europe usually referred to as *Biedermeier*. Frey has rediscovered the greatness of Schubert and also confesses with newly-won daring his treasonous defection from progressive modernity to which his enthusiasm for the Badenweiler spa orchestra and its sweet-sentimental potpourris from ancient operettas testifies. He is in the process of acquiring a good conscience for favoring Kitsch, provided, of course, that it is Kitsch of very long ago.

Anton Chekhov and, Hubert erroneously believes, Conrad Aiken died in the Park Hotel, and in fact these «memorial-worthy deaths» had recommended the hotel to him as particularly congenial. But his snobbish wish to be properly connected with the past receives a bad jolt. He has to let himself be advised by a true connoisseur that a proper snob would never have chosen the parvenu Park Hotel. Anyone in the know would certainly have taken up residence in the authentically ancient and far better-renowned Hotel Roman Baths. We note, already at this point, that Wohmann achieves her satirical effects by correcting false information by which the values which have made her protagonist look for such information in the first place are unmasked as false. Hubert Frey's snobbish opposition to the democratic levelling typical of the contemporary world proves to be based upon judgments that are

mistaken even within their own framework. Culture as consoling self-flattery turns out to be literally misinformed.

In *Fruhherbst in Badenweiler*, New Inwardness turns out to be a new version of the old topos of the Non-Political German. Again and again Hubert Frey's meditations refer the wary reader back to Thomas Mann's *Meditations of a Non-Political Man* (1918). Frey notes with gratification that the patrons of the Park Hotel «keep out of all politics» (223), even if it comes from the right. They are too refined to chime in with the popular conservative clamor for extreme measures against terrorism. They nobly ignore the «hideous song» of politics altogether. Yet, at the same time, he identifies himself in his Badenweiler «hideout» with the President of the Employers' Association of the Federal Republic whom leftist terrorists have kidnapped, a fact which ironically points out the conservative bias of «non-political man.» Frey renounces allegiance to the «democratic duty to communicate» which he sees as «the new super-ego» of the Federal Republic. He finds that socially engaged art does not meet anyone's need, since the so-called «disadvantaged» whom it is supposed to serve find socially significant art meaningless and greatly prefer «escapist» Kitsch to it. They simply fail to see the social message as applicable to them. Frey wishes to rid himself of his own «asinine guilt feeling» vis-à-vis the «*common man*» and «*the worker*» (both terms are italicized in the text). Against «atheistic chic» he sides with «transcendence» (105), and he signs a letter with «your society-, state-, and theater-weary Hubert Frey» (192).

Hubert Frey's true enemy is not the left *per se*. His real foe is that power which forms our contemporary consciousness—the media industry. Creativeness, formerly the preserve of solitary genius absorbed in itself, has become the prized merchandise of the media. Even the «way into inwardness» (86) itself has been occupied by «the culture business.» Our composer has decided to renounce a creativeness thus prostituted and to keep himself out of the public relations circuit on which talent is sold to the public. Savoring his secluded view of the forest from his room, he sees the Park Hotel as a vestibule leading to his «imminent breakdown.» Waiting for its coming, he might perhaps amuse himself writing a book about Schubert, or one about the effects of rain on human beings. He tries to become a «quietist in the land.» He wants to dive under, to submerge himself in the nerve-calming anonymity of a new version of Romantic *Waldeinsamkeit*.

Very intent on preserving his youthful appearance, despite his contempt of the modern cult of youth, Hubert Frey assures himself that «as a phaenotype,» he would be preserving «something slightly indefinable » The term «phaenotype» («Phänotyp») is taken from one of Gottfried Benn's longer narratives, entitled «Roman des Phänotyp» (1944), which Benn published in his volume *Der Ptolemaer* (1947) It thus immediately establishes a link to Alexandrian literature In Germany it was above all Gottfried Benn who, as the title of his collection *Der Ptolemaer* proclaims, raised Alexandrianism to the creative principle of modern writing In Alexandrian literature, encyclopaedic learning serves as the building material of literature The creative act does not lie in the synchronizing vision of widely disparate realms of knowledge Allusions, parodies, combinations, and variations of the scattered fragments of the cultural heritage of modern man create an art befitting an age oppressed by its sense of lateness and decline Such a «Ptolemaic art» had gone out of fashion after Benn Confronted with the problems left by the horrible Nazi past, preoccupied with the East/West division plaguing the present, and shocked by the excesses of vulgarity spawned by the «economic miracle,» the literature of West Germany had to pursue very different paths In such a context Gabriele Wohmann's novel constitutes a new beginning re-orienting and re-connecting West German literature with forgotten achievements of the not-so-distant past *Fruhherbst in Badenweiler* is a work of narrative literature in which the means of Alexandrianism—quotation, literary allusion, explicit and implicit literary echo—are fundamental means of ironic characterization

Alexandrian literature, with its linguistic collage and cultural-historical montage, has not been merely a passing phase of literary history It is closely linked to tendencies of our own time which reach far beyond *belles-lettres* In his *Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom shows how literature always defines itself by self-assertion against preceding literature Literature serves literature as a frame of reference and inspiration Bloom's theory seems so very persuasive today because it corresponds to a view which, shaped by linguistics, structuralism, and analytic philosophy, sees man primarily not as an individual, but as a recipient, transmitter, and communicator of collectively formed material Equivalent expressions of this view in *belles lettres* are, among many others, the novels of Samuel Beckett and Thomas Pynchon, and the plays of Peter Handke and Harold Pinter However, this view is not as new

as it is held to be today. It was precisely the Alexandrianism of the by now «classical modernism» of the first half of our century, which served as its godparent. The same T. S. Eliot who in his *Waste Land* created a masterpiece of Alexandrian literature emphasized in his criticism the enormous importance which «tradition» holds for «the individual talent,» and defended this view energetically against two opponents from opposite sides—the Kantian-Romantic doctrine of original genius on the one hand, and the doctrine of mimetic realism, on the other.

Using the methods of Alexandrian literature, Gabriele Wohmann's novel makes «the anxiety of influence» its subject. Like Brecht, Wohmann uses quotation and literary allusion as a means of social-cultural critique. She challenges the reader to transcend the posture she portrays. The author ironically undermines the fashionable identification of the individual with Literature by showing its problematical basis. I shall try to substantiate these comments by two examples—one a quotation, the other a literary allusion.

A quotation from one of Goethe's letters to Charlotte von Stein, written on a journey through the Harz Mountains, plays an important structural role in *Fruhherbst in Badenweiler*:

I have at last arrived *in a region as uninteresting as a soul when it experiences the highest state of well-being* (110)

«Ich bin nun endlich angelangt IN EINER GEGEND, SO UNINTERESSANT WIE EINE SEELE, WENN SIE SICH AM WOHLSTEN BEFINDET,

As Hubert admits later on, he has not quoted accurately (Goethe does not write «Wie eine Seele» but «Als eine Seele») and, without admitting it, Hubert has also changed and condensed Goethe's text. What shall first occupy us, however, is Hubert's purpose in quoting this passage.

Ostensibly the passage from Goethe's letter expresses the significance Badenweiler holds for Hubert. He identifies with that period in Goethe's life when the poet had begun to reject the Storm and Stress of his youth and was about to enter his «classical period.» Goethe himself, in this letter, anticipates the quietistic ideal of the subsequent *Biedermeier* restoration which was to follow the defeat of the much broader and more far-reaching «Storm and Stress» of the French Revolution and Napoleon.

Hubert Frey's «Fruhherbst» echoes Adalbert Stifter's *Nachsommer*—an «early autumn» patterned on the *Biedermeier* classicist's *Indian Summer*—and Stifter's *Nachsommer* in turn conceived of itself as the late echo of Goethe's classical moment. From the woods of Goethe's Harz Mountains, where his classicist quietism found its first voice, to Hubert Frey's Black Forest, which begins at his Park Hotel, the road leads through that «German Forest», which through Romanticism and *Biedermeier*—Tieck's *Waldeinsamkeit*, the fairytales of the Brothers Grimm, the poems of Eichendorff, the «Hochwald» of Adalbert Stifter—has entered the landscape of the German and European mind. Since Goethe's «Harzreise,» the woods of Germany have become a favorite *locus amoenus* of German Inwardness, they have served as its refuge from the ever-more pressing demands of a rapidly changing world.

The woods begin conveniently right in front of Frey's window in that Park Hotel where he experiences that «highest state of well-being» which Goethe compares to the «uninteresting» landscape where he has «at last arrived.» Hubert praises the woods in a projected letter to his sister Cilli as a sheltering retreat from the «questionable *Interessantheiten*» of contemporary life that threaten to tear him apart with their incessant demands. He wishes to confide to Cilli to whom subtly incestuous bonds seem to tie him, and whom he calls «a little bit *my* Charlotte» (175f), what the forest has come to mean to them both. The forest, he tells her, is more congenial to them than the sea. In former years, to be sure, the sea had been their «common element.» «Lately,» however, the forest has «taken on» this role (162). «The sea,» he writes, «is too rebellious for me, too interesting, you understand? Strictly secretive like the forest, yes, but not domestic» (186). He equates «the interesting» with the rebellious and extends praise of «the uninteresting,» authorized by Goethe, to include «boredom,» anathema to all modern, dynamic, and progressive sensibilities. Praise of boredom amounts to a provocative rejection of the spirit of revolt of the sixties which Hubert wishes to put as far behind him as Goethe, during his infatuation with Charlotte von Stein, wished to leave his Storm and Stress behind him. The avowed preference for the «uninteresting» woods over the «undomestic» and «rebellious» sea makes clear that it is not Romanticism *per se* to which Hubert wishes to return, but to its subdued and «domesticated» afterglow, the smugly provincial *Biedermeier*. Hubert's recently kindled passion for Schubert, which has displac-

ed his former love for Bach, is perfectly consistent with this newly acquired cultural nostalgia. That he saves his special love for the linden tree of «Am Brunnen vor dem Tore,» places Hubert in a straight line of succession from Thomas Mann's Castorp, who had indulged his fancy for this particular Schubert Lied when his lengthening stay on the Magic Mountain began to degenerate into a fatuous idleness and pointless self-indulgence. Unlike Hans Castorp, Hubert Frey is not a «burgher gone astray.» He is an ex-bohemian seeking to save himself by trying to re-enter the lost paradise of the bourgeois era which the technological revolution and its accompanying cultural-moral changes seem to have irrevocably closed to shipwrecks of modernity like himself.

The sphere of the «interesting» from which Hubert Frey seeks to save himself is, on the one hand, the cult of sexuality in which he no longer cares to (or perhaps is no longer able to) participate, and, on the other hand, the contemporary culture market with its «groupings, memberships, and conferences» (170). The category of «the interesting,» which had its roots in Romanticism, has degenerated into the media event, the scoop of the showmen. The interesting has become the latest, *le dernier cri* and *le dernier coup*, which makes thousands talk of nothing else for a few weeks. Walter Benjamin, in his essay on «The Storyteller,» has shown through the example of the oldest of the media, the newspaper, that the life center of the modern age has become the production of items of «interest.» The way of life produced by the modern newspaper has been, of course, infinitely accelerated and expanded by the rise of the younger media, radio and television, since Benjamin's diagnosis was made. Constantly driven to outdo the newest sensation by a still newer and even more sensational one, the life-style fostered by the media leads, according to Walter Benjamin, to the destruction of any feeling of continuity. As Gabriele Wohmann's novel shows, the cult of the interesting imposes upon the individual artist the frightening task of surpassing himself continuously, not in the direction of further development, but, on the contrary, toward a constant negating and displacement of his established image by a new one. The old image has outlived its newsworthiness and consequently has to give way to an image that will catch the public by surprise. The modern artist is forced to live in constant dread of being thrown into the dustbin of history, if he cannot come up with an entirely new style and persona each time he offers himself to public judgment. Above all the prospect of being

forgotten or considered «passe» and «old fashioned,» past the ability to arouse excitement, horrifies him. His younger colleagues (in Frey's case his own students) constantly threaten to displace him because their still untested and unlabelled youth promises a reservoir of novelty and potential excitement which the media are eager to exploit. The young must have an indisputable edge over the established artist whose image is already fixed and who is, therefore, with every passing moment, losing in interest and marketability. He can hope to maintain interest in himself only through constant self-reversals.

The servility of art to the media poses a special problem to the artist as he enters his middle years—a stage of life which Hubert Frey has now attained. Apparently out of protest against a perceived societal evil, he escapes into the «uninteresting region,» Badenweiler, spa for the aging, which is ignored by all those to whom the future belongs. Hubert Frey's espousal of the uninteresting as a superior value appears non-conformist and «courageous» in the face of the tyrannical cult of novelty which the media have fostered. His retreat seems a gesture of authentic cultural protest, a sincere act of rejection of degraded social values. The dust jacket of the novel seems to encourage such an interpretation.

The total situation was to blame,
the situation of the artist, which
had simply ceased to inspire ease

But by examining further the themes of Goethe and the interesting, we shall see that this is not quite the case.

First of all, Frey does not quote accurately, nor is he certain of the -quoted date. Thus his act of quoting Goethe's quietistic classicism, by which the cult of the interesting is to be displaced, emerges in a somewhat ironic light. The irony is deepened when Hubert pictures to himself the delight of writing an essay about historical simultaneity, investigating, for example, what Franz Schubert had been doing on that day, September 6, 1780, when Goethe wrote to Charlotte von Stein. However, as the reader knows, or can easily ascertain in any encyclopedia, Schubert had not yet been born. The target of irony is thus historicism itself, insofar as it represents a luxuriating in cultural nostalgia as a self-indulgent and defensive reaction to the perverted «literature

engagee» of the sixties Hubert Frey's justly negative response to the horror underneath the glitter of the media-dominated age is not nourished by true values nor even by correct knowledge It is only a pretense of historical culture, which posits the past sentimentally as the *ersatz* life for an un-lived present and its unsolved problems

You may indulge [Hubert encourages himself] in a little sourness, a little arrogance, a little Victorianism After all, you have had sufficient acquaintance with *the realm of the interesting* (181)

Thus he absolves himself from the obligation to be the contemporary of his time Badenweiler, as Hubert Frey's chosen form of life, embodies not genuine resistance to, but arrogant evasion of the socio-cultural malaise against which he inveighs

There is a second context in which the Goethe quotation is used as an ironic comment on Hubert's mere escapism from contemporary reality With the enthusiastic exclamation «This could truly be by myself!» (176), Hubert feels justified to «perhaps omit Goethe altogether as the author [of the quoted sentence] from his letter to Cilli » (176) Since Goethe's formulation had anticipated his own feelings so perfectly, there would be nothing wrong, he feels, in making the identification complete However, he is honest enough to realize that he is not as close to Goethe as he wishes to appear

The fact that Goethe moved *on horseback*, allowed himself to be involved with *a horse*, raised him in boldness and capacity of experience a hundredfold above Hubert (176)

Hubert realizes that the distance of the quoting intellectual of today from the culture hero of the past is enormous However, he does not draw the honest and obvious conclusion from his insight He does not renounce his self-identification with his historical model In bad faith, «he preferred to remember only those features which [Goethe and he] had in common » Therefore he is tempted to omit Goethe's name, pretending that Goethe's words are his own Quotation turns into plagiarism, and the self-deception that underlies Hubert's entire Badenweiler project, degenerates into outright fraud We encounter in this the same dishonesty which made Hubert welcome the old-fashioned fur-

nishings of his hotel room and at the same time sigh with relief that this cultural nostalgia stopped at the bathroom door. With this tiny, but highly revealing bit of hypocrisy, the text satirizes Frey's historicism as bad faith.

So far we have observed how Gabriele Wohmann uses quotation, a favorite device of Alexandrianism, to let the problematical aspects of her hero's historicism come into view. The function of quotation in her novel is to show that her protagonist's point of view does pose and illuminate a serious and pressing problem—that of the ageing artist in a quickly consuming era which threatens to become historical with respect to itself every few years. However, the attempt to escape from this problem, rather than to meet it, serves as the butt of her irony. Her ironic-satirical intent becomes even more obvious, if we examine the function that literary reference—as distinct from quotation—plays in her novel.

Hubert Frey has selected Badenweiler as his place of refuge because two famous authors, Anton Chekhov and, as he mistakenly assumes, Conrad Aiken had died there. The reference to Conrad Aiken will prove essential to the understanding of Gabriele Wohmann's intentions in the novel.

One of Conrad Aiken's best-known works, the short story, «Silent Snow, Secret Snow,» is told from the perspective of a boy who quite deliberately substitutes an illusion for the reality in which he finds himself. He talks himself into believing that an unending snowfall, perceptible only to himself, begins to separate him gradually from his fellow men and estranges him from reality to the point where he loses all possibility of staying in touch with other human beings. The snow symbolizes not only death or madness, but also the power of the imagination and the exclusiveness of the self as it seeks to distinguish itself from all others. Apart from the protagonist, no one can perceive that inner and unique reality which appears to the self as snow unseen by others. Only the self knows of the secret snowfall.

For the child protagonist of Aiken's story, the snow serves the same function that Badenweiler serves for Hubert Frey. The adjective «silent» in «silent snow» alludes to that withdrawal into silence which the composer Hubert Frey seeks to enter, and the two adjectives «silent» and «secret» point to his desired isolation. It is significant that he wishes to recommend this story especially to his sister Cilli, to whom a secret quasi-incestuous intellectual-spiritual love binds him. Their relationship partakes of a secret which is

theirs alone This narcissistic passion forms a counterpoint to Hubert's marriage to the chain-smoking, public-relations activist Selma Selma is characterized by that non-stop communication not atypical of Berliners While Selma—bursting with energy and breathlessly involved in perpetually engaging causes—represents Hubert's exit gate into the contemporary world, Cilli embodies his romantic yearning for infinity, silent self-communion, fusion with infinity through love or death

The invisible snow of Conrad Aiken's story, like Hubert Frey's retreat to Badenweiler, (which is above all also a «vacation» from Selma) is not simply to be equated with death as cessation of consciousness It represents rather the consciously savored pleasure of experiencing the approach of death Aiken's child hero takes a special delight in the ever-faster fading away of the sounds made by the mailman in the morning, because they indicate that the wall of snow around him is growing higher and higher But when the morning comes when he can no longer hear the mailman's steps, he grieves over this ending of his desire for the end Now that the snow has cut him off forever from all the sounds and signs of life, he wishes the total isolation he had longed for had not come so soon

The snow in Aiken's story obviously represents inwardness and the imagination as well as death It points to what might loosely be called romanticism or «the poetic,» conceived of in popularly romantic terms In any event, Conrad Aiken, as the author of the story, and his supposed death in Badenweiler signify that complex for Hubert Frey Within the framework of Wohmann's novel, longing for death, the theme of Aiken's story, is equated with living according to literary models Both Aiken and Chekhov are thought to have died in Badenweiler In consequence, Badenweiler had become the desirable and sacred *locus* to which Hubert Frey retired in order to find a soothing and voluptuous surcease from the stresses of life It thus corresponds to the snow fall in Aiken's story Withdrawal into the New Inwardness emerges as the latest descendant of that «Sympathie mit dem Tode» which had lured Thomas Mann's «problem child of life,» Hans Castorp, up the Magic Mountain of luxurious disease

Closely analogous to the «magic mountain» of Thomas Mann's *Davos*, Hubert Frey's Badenweiler represents not merely the Romantic lure of death, but at the same time its successful overcoming Snow, as we recall, also plays a vital role in Thomas Mann's *Bildungsroman* The chapter entitled «Snow» shows both

climax and conquest of that «interest in death and disease» which holds Hans Castorp captive. In *Frühherbst in Badenweiler*, it is a fictive snowfall, which through its author, Conrad Aiken, exercises the same double function of bringing the protagonist's fascination with «sweet easeful death» to a head, while at the same time serving as the catalyst that frees him from it. In Thomas Mann's novel, indebted as it still is to the conventions of literary realism, it is the fiction of an actual snow fall experienced by that hero on a solitary ski trip in the Swiss Alps that functions as the causal circumstance of the ideological peripeteia. In Gabriele Wohmann's novel, which makes literary echo and reference its theme, the same function is assumed by a literary snowfall. With this ironic shift in causation, Wohmann shows herself to be the contemporary of Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*. In her fiction, the character's decisive experiences issue from other literature rather than from his own life, as is still the case in Thomas Mann's novel. Life is shown to be shaped by literature.

At the end of the novel, Hubert Frey learns that he had been misinformed in thinking that Conrad Aiken had died in Badenweiler. To be sure, an American writer had indeed died there, but it was not Conrad Aiken, it was Stephen Crane. What had lured Hubert Frey to Badenweiler and kept him there turns out to have been false—an imagined literary echo, not an authentic one.

Of course, Stephen Crane was also an author. Thus his death can be seen as much a literary echo as Conrad Aiken's. However, if we examine the vast and crucial difference between the two writers' treatment of the same subject, the full scope of Gabriele Wohmann's irony becomes apparent.

Both Americans had authored stories which had snow as their theme—which explains Hubert Frey's confusing Aiken with Crane. In Wohmann's text, the title of Crane's story is given as «Schneesturm». The real title in the English original is «Men in the Storm». Even though Crane's plot also centers around a snow storm, content and intent of the two snow tales greatly diverge. Stephen Crane's story deals with real snow and is a bitter indictment of social conditions. The plot is laid in New York City in a snow storm during the depression of the eighteen eighties. It shows the miseries of the unemployed who, shivering in the snow storm, are reduced to waiting in line for a plate of warm soup which will be doled out to them by the asylum. The raging snow storm does not symbolize anything, it merely underlines the grim exposure to the

elements to which an inadequate social system abandons its wretched victims. A far cry indeed from Conrad Aiken's tale in which snow symbolizes an inwardness reaching out beyond the body's imprisonment in empirical reality. Conrad Aiken's snow is precisely not the mimetic portrait of real-life weather that Crane's snow so decidedly is. Aiken's «snow» is the symbol of the attempt to transcend the reality with which human beings as creatures of nature and society have to deal. In terms of form, the difference between Crane and Aiken is that between naturalism and symbolism. In terms of authorial intention, it is the difference between socio-critical engagement and the illumination of a psychic proclivity for death. At the end of Wohmann's novel, the literary echo of Romanticism and symbolism—Conrad Aiken—literally turns out to be the wrong echo. The error is corrected, again literally, by a reference to the literature of realism and social criticism. The twist in the plot of *Fruhherbst in Badenweiler* amounts to a value statement about literature. The literature of realism and social awareness proves to be literally «correct,» i.e., it is based on the factually correct information. The romantic-symbolist literature of inwardness and subjectivity, on the other hand, proves to be literally «inappropriate» to Hubert Frey's circumstances. Thereby a judgment is made about Hubert Frey's retreat into the New Inwardness of Badenweiler. What had enticed him to Badenweiler has been a mistake. The sequence of the narrated events leads from the error of inwardness to the correctness of social awareness, and this in turn, leads to Hubert Frey's final encounter with a part of physical reality which will drive him out of his room in the Park Hotel and back into the everyday reality which he had tried to flee.

A mouse invades Hubert's cosy hotel room and sends him back to an active and creative involvement in life. Confronting the intolerable intrusion into his privacy that the mouse represents, Hubert has to make a decision for the first time in the story. His decision is to move out without further ado, to cut short his «vacation» from life (a literary echo of Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*?) and return to his job as a university teacher, and to his work as a composer.

The correction of Hubert Frey's literary-historical error prefigures the concluding encounter with reality in its most basic form. The displacement of the «enormous» symbolist by the «appropriate» realist points ahead to the switch from a life according to literary models to a life of action in empirical-social reality.

«Make your decision!» Hubert Frey exhorts himself during the decisive confrontation with the mouse, which will put an abrupt end to his nostalgically stylized retreat

The exit is open, after all The spring of Hubert's mousetrap was released Start doing something with your—so dreadfully brief—life! (266)

Frey's self-exhortation to a «vie engagee» is followed appropriately by his adoption of a new perspective on his life He forces himself to view himself from outside, with detachment, instead of savoring his reactions to his life inwardly He examines the two actors in the drama—the mouse and himself—from an objective point of view

Which of them was more helpless, looked at from an over-all perspective, the mouse or Hubert? Surely not Hubert, who besides had been allotted a much more generous time span for reflecting (266)

With this passage the text ends Seen from this ending, Badenweiler, and with it the New Inwardness, turns out to have been no more than a passing breakdown, a mouse trap that had luckily been left unsprung

In Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, the overcoming of German inwardness is accomplished by nothing short of a World War It takes nothing less than that cataclysmic event to drive Hans Castorp down from his retreat In Gabriele Wohmann's Badenweiler, a mouse suffices to bring about a comparable result Thus the literary echo «Magic Mountain» that underlies Badenweiler is ironized as well The mountain has become a hotel room and World War I has become a mouse Ironization of literary echo, decisive device for the structure of the novel, functions thematically as the cure for that modish and passing relapse into German Inwardness which early autumn in Badenweiler symbolizes

NOTES

1 All quotations and references are my translations from the text Gabriele Wohmann, *Frühherbst in Badenweiler* Roman Darmstadt and Neuwied Luchterhand Verlag 1978 The numbers in parentheses refer to the pages in this text

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